

THE STORY OF AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

By MRS. OLIPHANT.

CHAPTER I.

THE DISCOVERY.

JOHN BARRINGTON BOLTON was one of the large and much varied army of London clerks. There are of all classes and kinds in this innumerable host, from the gentlemen in the public offices, to the poorest little scrubby boy, who sweeps out a poor barrister's chambers, or waits upon the involuntary leisure of a young stockbroker; of grades innumerable, of condition and education as varied. Through all those shades of quality, which the lowest cling to with more tenacity than the highest, this universal profession descends to his acknowledged poor clerk, who is much better off than the superiors, in so far as the appearance that he has to keep up comes to little more than his decent coat, and there is no ghost of a 'position' behind him to make his poverty more bitter. Our friend above named had been of the middle order of this over-abundant class. He had been educated at one of the smaller public schools. His mother had been a Barrington. He was not himself quite sure, perhaps, what this meant, or the amount of social lustre conveyed in it; but he had been always told so from his earliest recollection, as a source of pride, and believed in it still, though he felt the vague character of the advantage more than in his earlier days. He was careful always to preserve the Barrington in his name, but he no longer, perhaps, expected the people whom he met to be dazzled by it. In sundry other ways, his first illusions had failed him. He had been promoted from the Sixth Form, and a highly satisfactory position in his school, where the sense of greatness is more undoubting than in any other sphere, to a clerkship in a London bank, by which everybody belonging to him believed his fortune to be made. He thought so himself, and was much pleased with both his circumstances and income for the first year or two, while he was still quite young. But after this he fell into many adventures. It was not, perhaps, altogether his own fault. He had not learnt the value of money one may be sure at school, where he never had any, save the smallest of allowances, and he thought that his two hundred pounds a year contained endless luxury and delight. It was some time before he found out what a delusion this was, tradespeople and others being so kind and ready to believe in the credit of a young man introduced by special interest, the *protégé* of one of the partners. Nobody was aware how very slight the tie was which bound him even to that partner, and how very far off was the possibility that he might himself become a partner in his turn. Had he been very much devoted to his duties, with his nose always at the grindstone, the first to come, the last to leave, the discoverer of inaccuracies, the suggester of new and profitable investments—in short, the model clerk of moral fiction, it is possible that the auguries of his careless companions might have been carried out, and the hopes of his family fulfilled. But, unfortunately, these careless companions who prophesied his advancement made it impossible. They made him careless too. They infected him with their own indifference to hours, and disinclination to work. The poor young fellow meant no harm. Loafing had, indeed, been 'barred' at school; it had been the sin most sternly denounced by all authorities there; but loafing at school and in London are very different things, and at first young Bolton thought he was improving his mind—well, if not improving his mind, yet, at least, seeing life, and increasing his knowledge of the world. Life meant what it usually means to the hapless young man, the victim of his fellows; themselves debased by the same endless round, in the same ways of folly. He had seen honest, serious life, such as five-fourths of humanity live, in his father's house, and he knew the manly simple existence of the school: yet now he gave that name to the dregs of London dissipation; to that kind of folly which is alone possible to young men who have to enjoy themselves on two hundred a year. At two thousand there might possibly have been some beauty or attraction in it—but for this! Oh, piteous loss; oh, unfortunate boy! to have his young memory soiled with sordid images, his young imagination disgusted, his young career stopped short. It was all over before the time at which John Barrington Bolton is introduced to the reader. He was no longer in the bank. He had no longer two hundred a year. He had dropped to another level altogether, a lower income; and as for prospects, it could not be said that he had any. No one now prophesied for him a partnership anywhere. He

had joined the innumerable army of clerks, without individuality, and without hope, who *fournillent* in all great cities. There is generally a moment in which these hapless ones may catch the tide, and become prosperous, more or less, if there is any force of character and will in them; there is always a time in which they may be imprudent and marry, and so secure themselves a chance in another way. Bolton did neither; he dropped into the crowd. He had learned his lesson, and knew that no man can trifle absolutely with fate; but his moral fibre had no doubt suffered more perhaps than he was aware of, in those times when he had been under water, and had lost himself in that black and fetid stream.

Coming to himself at last on the lower level, and having found it necessary to cut down every possible expense, Bolton had, after a struggle, found himself a lodging in one of those strange corners of this great world of London which nobody knows. It lies behind Piccadilly, as near the parks and the abodes of fashion as the choicest streets in Mayfair—yet totally unknown and undiscovered, even by many of those who know London, as obscure as any village in the country, although within reach of the centre of civilisation, and with the roar of one of the greatest thoroughfares in the world always in its ears. It looks, indeed, like a very disreputable village in the country. There are two rows of cottages, with shabby little palings and dusty little gardens, and a road, not very safe for wheeled vehicles, running between, like a village street. There are dingy representatives of clematis, jessamine, even roses, trained about the shabby lattices and up the dingy walls. When you enter its precincts, heads are thrust out at doors and windows, often garlanded by these dusty creepers, like the *décor* of a shabby theatre. Children play in the little gardens, digging holes in the grey soil, which looks like solid dust. It is supposed to be dangerous sometimes to wake the echoes of 'the Garden,' for, except when they are quarrelling among themselves, which is usually the case, all the inhabitants take part with each other against the stranger. This was the strange place in which Bolton found lodgings in the new phase of his life. It amused him, as being so unlike anything he had ever known before. His little sitting-room was not unpleasant. It was a room on the first floor, with a broad lattice window, on the sunny-side of this preposterous village. A Virginian creeper clothed the walls, and there was a China rose, just high enough to send a few pale blossoms into his window. It was like being in the country, he said to himself, with a laugh. In the country, yet just behind Piccadilly! Nothing could be more droll. The sound of the women gossiping at their doors, and the shouts of the children came to his ear shrill against the big accompaniment of the constant tumult of the great street. It was very quaint. The address, perhaps, was not a very dignified one. Golden Gardens—it sounded very suburban—but what of that? Few people came to see him, and those few knew well enough that he had found it necessary to economise—nay, they were almost all, as he well knew, in the same circumstances themselves. The rooms were very cheap, and they were rather nice—in short, there was an attempt about them to be more *nice* than is at all common in cheap lodgings. There was not the usual everlasting horsehair, and red and blue woollen tablecover, but chintz that was not very much faded, and curtains that were cheap, but had a reminiscence of Liberty's about them. 'They belonged to my last tenant, sir,' the landlady said; 'poor gentleman.' But she lent a deaf ear to any further questions—not even the name of this late tenant ever fell from her discreet lips. 'Ah, poor gentleman!' she said: but no more.

Bolton found himself very comfortable when he had settled down. The late tenant had evidently known what comfort was. He had furnished a *sommier elastique* to the bed. He had put in a very comfortable easy-chair. The writing-table in the corner, fitted in so cleverly as to take up the smallest space possible, was his. He had taken all that trouble himself, 'for he was a wonderful man with his hands—there was nothing he could not do,' Mrs. Matthews said. 'But what surprises me is, that after doing so many things to make himself comfortable, he should have gone away,' said Bolton. 'Why did he leave Mrs. Matthews?' Mrs. Matthews only answered then and always, 'Ah, poor gentleman!' with a shake of her head.

By degrees this became a great curiosity and wonder to her new lodger. He talked about it to the few friends who came to see him. 'I wonder who he was? She never "puts a name to him," as she says. She will tell me nothing about him. He seems to have gone away in a hurry, so far as I can make out, and to have left everything behind him. So many contrivances for comfort, as if he meant to stay for ever.'

'Perhaps she wanted to marry him,' said one.

'Perhaps it was duns—frightened away,' said another.

'Perhaps somebody left him a fortune.'

'Perhaps he has left his country for his country's good.'

None of these solutions found favour in Bolton's eyes. The landlady was a humble-minded mother, who went about with an old bonnet upon her head, and folded her apron over her arm, and sniffed as she spoke. The ingenious devices with which the little rooms were made almost dainty did not look like a man in terror of duns. As for the other two suggestions, they were dismissed with the contempt they merited. Very few are the lucky men to whom somebody suddenly leaves a fortune, fewer still those who have to pay the vulgar penalties of guilt. Such persons herd among their own kind, and though Golden Gardens was not renowned for the respectability of its tenants, yet it almost wounded Bolton's feelings that he could be suspected to have had a thief for his predecessor. He could not but feel a sympathy for the man who had left him a comfortable bed, chintz furniture, curtains from Liberty's, and a handy writing-table. He must have been a nice fellow. 'Poor gentleman!' he echoed. Whatever had carried him off, it was a wind which had blown himself, John Bolton, much good. He enjoyed the rooms. Often he found himself so comfortable on the nice little sofa, with a good fire, that he returned to the studies of his youth, and wrote or read instead of going out: it began to feel like home: all which was owing to the removed or deceased predecessor, the former tenant. 'I hope, poor fellow, he is better, and not worse, off,' Bolton often said.

One evening he examined more closely than he had yet done the construction of the writing-table, and found it full of ingenious contrivances. One little projection in the carving yielded to the touch of his hand, though it did not seem to veil a drawer, and showed him a little repository, full of papers. Some of these were merely scraps torn off letters; some had curious plans upon them, which it was difficult to understand—maps of roads sometimes, sometimes plans of the interiors of houses.

'He must have been an architect, poor fellow,' Bolton said. Curiously enough, the plans seemed to be chiefly of the inferior parts of houses—the kitchen, pantry, butler's room, being specially marked, back stairs, back doors, etc. It was strange to find only these portions of the houses, which no doubt his unknown associate (which was now how he felt towards the former tenant) had planned. He was much startled, among these scraps, to come suddenly upon a letter—an envelope, at least, neither sealed nor directed, but evidently containing a sheet of written paper. He took this out with great interest, and looked it all over on both sides, weighing it in his hand. He felt certain that it contained a letter, probably of great importance to the poor fellow, which perhaps he thought he had sent, which perhaps he had been hurried away from and forgotten. Poor gentleman! Bolton felt very kindly towards the unknown, as he weighed this letter in his hand: most probably it was something which it would grieve him to have forgotten—which might have exercised an evil influence on his fate. He thought of the incident, so common in novels, of the declaration of love, for which perhaps some wistful girl was waiting, but which might lie there for years, until both the girl who expected it, and the man who longed for an answer, had broken their hearts over the blank that had fallen upon all their hopes: could it be that love-letter? Bolton had a great respect in his heart, though probably he would have laughed at it openly, for the love tale; and to think of it thus baulked filled him with regret. He put the envelope back again in the drawer, almost with tenderness. It was not for his profane eyes to investigate so touching a thing.

But he was curious all the same. He thought of it all day as he went about his business. When he came home in the evening, after he had eaten his frugal dinner, he proceeded again to the writing-table, and began to play with the little piece of carving which concealed the spring. He made a sort of game of chance out of it. If he found the spring within five minutes he would look at the letter. He took out his watch, and began to examine the piece of carving with his fingers, without the aid of his eyes. Long before the five minutes were out he had found the button; the drawer was open before him, with its little heap of cabalistic designs, and the envelope. He had gained the right to open it. It was not fastened in any way, so there was no need of any fracture or sign of violence. Inside was a small sheet of notepaper folded across. He drew it out, and opened it with a heart that began to beat loudly, fearing the discovery which he might be about to make. It bewildered him above measure to see the words that were written at the head, 'Dear Jack.' His romance faded away in a moment, but a flash of keen surprise came in—'Dear Jack'—it was his own name: was it to himself this letter had been written? The mystery grew. To

find a letter awaiting himself in this wonderful way was more extraordinary even than any romance.

'Dear Jack,—I don't doubt you will come and look up the old place when you hear what's happened. I have no time, and not much to leave you for your pains. Take this; it's all I can do. If you're ever hard up about Christmas time, send a letter to G. C., Poste Restante, The Hague Holland. Desire the answer to be sent to J. B., at any post-office you like. Best to change this from year to year. It's as good as a twenty pound note to you till I come back. Put this in the letter: "*All safe to this date. Discretion to be counted on as long as word kept.*" Short and sweet, ain't it, like the telegraph. Then J. B., and the address, that's all. I give it over to you with my blessing. Good-bye, and do the best you can for yourself, old boy.—From your brother Jim.'

Bolton read this with a stupefied astonishment. At first it seemed to him a mere farrago of nonsense. The curious thing was that he, too, had a brother Jim, and the bewildering feeling that it must be intended for himself, yet could not be so, prevented him for a time from thinking of its meaning. Of course he knew it was not from his brother Jim: yet altogether it was very strange. He laughed a little at himself for his sentimental imaginations as he folded up the letter from Jim to Jack. Then he unfolded it again, and once more read it over. If you are ever hard up—Bolton reflected that if his own brother Jim had been writing, he would have known that he, Jack, was always hard up. As good as a twenty pound note! He felt his heart stir at these words. Few things in this world are more acceptable, more delightful than a twenty pound note, unless it is one for a hundred pounds. He would not mind what address he gave, or what he said, in a letter which would bring him that delightful windfall. The only thing was, it was evidently not intended for him. Probably the other Jack would come for it one of these days, and his chance be over. He had replaced the envelope in the desk, but now he suddenly and quickly snatched it up again, and placed it in one of the pockets of his own writing-book. He said to himself that it would not do to entrust Jack, who was a stranger, with such a commission. He might not be worthy of it. He might not want it. If you are ever hard up—these words pointed to a state of stall-fed comfort on the part of the other Jack. A fat purse in his pocket, a good meal on his table, what could he want with a twenty-pound note at Christmas? Bolton began to feel a natural antagonism against this fat and comfortable Jack, who, he felt sure, would have no delicacy in executing his brother's charge. He shut up the secret drawer with a snap, as much as to say, 'There's for you!' He would not leave a trust which might perhaps be a delicate trust in such hands.

The next day was Sunday, and Jack Bolton had spent the morning as most of his kind spend it, with a 'long lie,' a late breakfast, and much enjoyment of the ease and quiet of the privileged day on which no work needs to be done. He had got through all those leisurely and luxurious morning rites, his bath, his dressing, his breakfast, all at his ease, to the accompaniment of a softened chatter in the air outside, a calmed version of the usual talk of Golden Gardens, where sweet leisure was reigning too. A number of the children had been sent off to Sunday school. The men were hanging about their doors exchanging observations, still amicable and moderately pleasant over their pipes: and the usual roar of Piccadilly came through the sunny autumn air with a softened strain. It was late autumn, almost winter, but the morning was warm and soft. Sometimes a red leaf fluttered down from the Virginia creeper past the window. The peacefulness and the sweet consciousness that, on this day, there was no need to do anything but what pleased himself, no office to go to, no work to be done, softened everything. Bolton felt that if, like the Marchioness, he made believe very strong, he might think himself in the country a cheerful youth and free of care.

At this moment his landlady knocked at the door, a little stealthy tap, suggesting—not his boots, nor a fresh rasber of bacon, nor even to ask if Mr. Bolton would fancy a look at the penny paper, with all the murders and accidents, which was her delight—but something disagreeable, some demand, which brought disturbance with it. If it had been a weekday he would have expected a little bill: but she was a woman above these unpleasant surprises, and, thank Heaven, it was Sunday. 'Come in Mrs. Matthews,' he said. She came half in, as was her wont; and, standing with the door dividing her in two, said, 'If you please, Mr. Bolton—'

The thing might be something which did not please him at all, but she always used this formula. 'Well, Mrs. Matthews,' said Jack.

'If you please, there is a gentleman downstairs, sir.

He says as he's the brother of —, the poor gentleman as was here before you came.'

'Oh,' said Jack to himself, 'he hasn't lost any time:' which was natural enough, yet entirely nonsense, as the reader will perceive—for, of course, the stranger was unaware that Jack Bolton had made that discovery only a day or two before. 'Well, Mrs. Matthews?' Mr. Bolton said again.

'I said as I didn't like to trouble a gentleman of a Sunday morning; but he says as he couldn't come no other day, and that there's one place as he'd like to look at, to see if there wasn't nothing for him. I told him as I'd cleared out all the drawers, and put everything straight afore you come. But he won't take No for his answer. You see, sir,' said Mrs. Matthews, coming a little more into the room, and closing the door lightly upon her left arm, 'the poor gentleman left me his things, very liberal like, and I wouldn't wish to stir up no disturbance. Maybe you wouldn't mind if he did come up just for a minute and looked about?'

'Oh, no; I shouldn't mind in the least. Take away the breakfast things, and send him up as soon as you please.' Jack Bolton reflected that the enigmatical letter was safe, and it amused him to think of the other Jack's search. It depended upon what sort of a fellow the other fellow was. If he was a decent sort of a man, there would be plenty of time to hand over the letter from Jim.

When he appeared, that question was solved in a moment. He was not at all a decent sort of a man. He was a broad-shouldered, big fellow, in clothes that betrayed an acquaintance with stables, but not so respectable as that, an acquaintance at second hand. He had traces of a colour, not desirable in that locality, round his left eye. He came in with a stealthy step, and cast a look round, which was, as plainly as possible, intended to ascertain whether there were any valuables about. Bolton felt thankful that his watch was still in his bedroom, and that the door was closed—for the new comer was bigger than himself, and the sympathies of Golden Gardens were rather in favour of than against the breakers of the law.

'Morning,' the newcomer said, with a surly nod; 'a lot of them things belonged to a brother of mine. I don't know if you knew?'

'I don't know anything about it,' said Bolton. 'I rent the rooms from Mrs. Matthews. I hear you want to look for something. Look sharp, please.'

'Oh, you're in a hurry, are you?' growled the fellow—and he was such a big brute—and no policeman, one might be sure, within reach; and the sympathies of Golden Gardens not to be calculated upon!

'Well, the rooms happen to be mine,' said Bolton; 'and I am expecting some friends. If you'd look sharp, I should be pleased.'

The fellow stood in the middle of the room, filling it all up. He gave a slow stare all round, like the stare of a bull. Finally his eyes fixed on the writing-table. Jack Bolton followed his movements with what we can only describe as a malign pleasure. He hastened to remove his own papers from the table to facilitate the search.

'Oh, I don't want nothing with your dirty papers,' his amiable visitor said. He found the spring; he opened the drawer, Bolton following his every movement with secret satisfaction. But he was evidently much disappointed by the contents. The plans and drawings he snatched up, crushed together, and thrust into his pocket, with an alarmed look at Bolton, who was calmly reading Mrs. Matthews's paper. But having done so, he took them out again, shook them, so that they fell back in a shower into the drawer, gathered them up once more, examined the little heap, felt in all the corners, evidently without finding what he was in search of. At last, he closed the drawer with a bang, and got up, his big bulk darkening the window and filling up the room.

'I hope,' said Bolton, with great politeness, 'that you have found what you were looking for.'

'No, I haint found nothing,' cried the man, with threatening looks. 'Somebody's been a tampering with the secret drawer.'

'Oh, is there a secret drawer? May I see the construction? That's very interesting,' Bolton said.

The man stared at him, muttered an oath, looked round again with that hungry glare, and finally plunged downstairs like a wild beast, to have an angry altercation with the landlady below.

'So that was Jack,' Bolton said to himself with a smile, throwing open the window to purify the air. He smiled at the writing-book in which the letter lay, with a sense of superior virtue, which it would perhaps have been difficult to analyse. He felt that he had perhaps saved the world from a crime. He thought, with a sense of mischievous amusement, of the renowned cases in which a scrap of paper,

sought for in all manner of recondite places, has been found in the simplest way, not concealed at all, for greater security. He had no more doubt that he had done a good action than had the excellent Sunday School teacher who lived at the top of the Gardens, and who was returning at that moment from chapel, feeling, with a sigh which was not altogether sad, that most of the careless fellows at their doors had hell-fire visibly behind them. Bolton did not doom his disappointed namesake to that final judgment; but he thought, with satisfaction, that a long sentence and seclusion from the common ways of men would probably soon be that gentleman's lot.

(To be continued.)

Moments Musicals.

WHERE the Reverend Dr. Syntax still among us, the music of the last few days would have furnished him with at least one extra canto for his famous 'Tour in Search of the Picturesque.' Within three days were heard Dvřak's 'Spectre's Bride'; Berlioz's 'Symphonie Fantastique' and his 'Lelio on le retour à la vie,' to say nothing of Mendelssohn's 'Elijah,' and Mackenzie's 'Jubilee Ode,' in which a procession of the various nationalities subject to her Majesty is depicted. Even little Josef contributed some *quasi* 'programme music,' his selection on Monday including the 'Moonlight' sonata and Weber's 'Invitation à la Valse.' Whether our Mus. Doc's will now prescribe a course of 'Fugues and Op.'s at Monday-Pops,' by way of sedative, remains to be seen. *Place aux dames!* The 'Spectre's Bride,' whose ghastly '*voyage de nocces*' has been so wonderfully described by the gifted Bohemian composer, lent distinction on Thursday to the first Novello Concert of the season, and materially added to an already large number of admirers in consequence. True, but repeated hearing reveals some inequalities; for imaginative power; for weird, yet always poetical, orchestral and harmonic colour; for striking, often beautiful, and always appropriate melodic characteristics, the work is head and shoulders above most of its contemporaries. Yet it is evident that the composer has yet hardly made up his mind on the subject of style. Dvřak has a very strongly pronounced individuality, and when he gives free play to this, is often great and always interesting. Unfortunately, his acquaintance with, and perhaps admiration for, the works of other composers, leads him not seldom to adopt, whether consciously or otherwise, their phraseology and manner, and so to imperil the unity of his own work. Details could be given if necessary. Whether Dvřak mistrusts himself, or whether he thinks it 'wise' not to be too original, I, not being his Father Confessor, am unable to say.

Criticism of a *pièce d'occasion* is generally a waste of valuable ink; but Dr. Mackenzie is too true an artist to write even a 'Jubilee Ode' without merits beyond those demanded by momentary needs. Accordingly, the musician finds in the choral passages, and in the orchestration of this piece, much to admire; an unaccompanied prayer and the already mentioned procession music being especially noticeable. A tenor solo, if not very original, is taking and tuneful; but the elaborate air for soprano unmistakably suggests the maleficent influence of the *prima donna*, before whose shrine so many composers have sacrificed. It is little more than a string of phrases admirably calculated to exhibit Madame Albani's best notes to the greatest advantage. That lady sang it *con amore* on Thursday; and also repeated, with full measure of success, her admirable rendering of the 'Spectre's Bride' whom the Bohemian librettist has unaccountably left unprovided with a name. Mr. Harper Kearton, the tenor, was rather disappointing. He has a charming voice, which he knows how to use; but he never allows himself to be betrayed into an expression of feeling. That would be undignified.

The prospect of an afternoon with Berlioz proved by no means sufficient to fill the concert-room at Sydenham. Yet to those who have learnt, in any degree, to appreciate the vast resources of a modern orchestra, and the extraordinary variety of styles to which their use by different minds has given birth, what could have been more interesting? For whereas with most composers of eminence the orchestra is but an accessory, intensifying, by its inexhaustible capabilities for colour-combination, the emotion already suggested by the melodic inspiration, with Berlioz orchestration is the beginning and the end of the matter. His inspirations, many of them evincing genius of a high order, consist mainly of orchestral combinations or effects. The thematic scaffolding is often of quite an ordinary type, bearing, moreover, evident marks of deliberate invention, with a view solely to orchestral

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CHAPTER II. THE TEMPTATION.

BOLTON thought a great deal for some time after of what he called the irruption of the criminal classes into his room, and described his Sunday visitor to his friends with much animation. 'Half fox and half wolf—half groom and half prize-fighter—and, I should say, whole burglar and thief,' he said. Perhaps this description was imaginative, and a little too vigorous in expression; but the impression made upon him had been strong. He tried afterwards to get some information about his predecessors in his room—the Jim, who surely must be very unlike the Jack—but with small success. Mrs. Matthews shook her head, and sniffed, and said, 'Ah, poor gentleman!' but would not afford any more definite information. He must have been a man who liked to be comfortable, and knew what comfort was; whereas, to Jack it was very evident a taproom would have been quite satisfactory. Finally, Bolton relinquished the idea of searching out this mystery. After all, it was nothing to him. He went upon his way, and remembered it no more.

All this time the abstraction of the letter had seemed to him quite natural and right. He was exceedingly pleased with himself for having removed it before the burglar's visit; for who could tell what use that wretched creature might have made of it? He took it out from the pocket of his writing-book from time to time, and looked at it with great satisfaction. Whatever it was, it was safe there; it might record some painful story, something full of interest, which it would be exciting to find out; but, at all events, it was a good thing, in every way, to have saved it from the clutches of the criminal. One curious thing, however, in Jack Bolton's conduct at this period of his life was that, in recounting the other Jack's visit to his friends, he never said a word about this letter. 'What do you suppose he was looking for?' one of them had said. 'Oh, money, I should think,' said another. Bolton allowed them to question, and to suggest, but he volunteered no information. He could not tell why he was so reticent about this, for, of course, it would have given great point to the story. He acted simply upon impulse at first, an impulse without reason; afterwards, it became a sort of necessity to keep silence on this subject, because he had not mentioned it at first.

And presently other affairs and incidents of life came in, and he forgot about Jim and Jack. They receded into the background, and matters much more important to himself filled up the course of every day. The things that went on at the office—a little misunderstanding he had with one of his fellow-clerks—a little bit of favouritism shown in the promotion of one over the head of the others, sufficed to occupy his mind, and drive out subjects less important. There was a great deal of excitement over that piece of favouritism. Harford, who was Bolton's nearest neighbour in the office, and about his own standing, came home with him to talk it over—at least, they walked from the City together with so much to say that our young man found himself at the entrance to Golden Gardens before he knew. He had never yet introduced Harford, or any one from the office there; and, indeed, had not meant to do so, the locality not being, perhaps, exactly fitted for a respectable clerk; but in the heat of talk he had forgotten that. They had not half finished their discussion of all the occult motives which must have influenced the heads, and all the demerits of Haines, who was the unjustly promoted clerk, when Bolton turned out of Piccadilly instinctively by his usual turning to go home, and they had actually entered the Gardens before he was aware of what he had done.

'I say, what a queer place. I never knew there was such a place so close to Piccadilly. What funny places there are in London, to be sure.'

'Yes,' said Bolton, with a little embarrassment, 'and you'll think it still funnier when I tell you that I live here.'

'Oh, I say!' cried the other young man. It passed through his mind that Bolton might have a mother who was a washerwoman, or something of that sort: a good deal of mystery was frequently kept up among men in the office about their origin and belongings. Those who lived with their families did not usually know their comrades 'at home.'

'It's quite true, though. I stumbled upon it entirely by accident. My people at home had a servant who lived here. He brought me over with him to see his wife when I was a child.' Bolton liked to show his comrades that at his home men-servants were an ordinary part of the establishment. 'I

remembered it in a moment when I drifted through one day, thinking of nothing particular. I was looking for lodgings at the time, and when I saw a card up, went in to look—for fun really, with no serious intention. But the place was so quaint. Come and see for yourself.'

'It is quaint, by Jove,' the other young man said: but it is doubtful whether he attached an agreeable interpretation to the words. He gave an exclamation of satisfaction, however, when he had climbed up the dark little stair. 'And deuced comfortable, too,' he cried. This made a break in the discussion of their wrongs. The first step being thus taken, Bolton was not ill-pleased to display his rooms, which were really very nice, much above the ordinary level of a lodging-house.

'I owe my luxuries to my predecessor,' he said; and he told the story as he was in the habit of telling it, the story of Jack, his namesake, the burglar, as he generally called him, but without any mention of the letter, which was, to be sure, the point of the whole.

'And the fellow who was here before you was that fellow's brother?'

'It seems so; the man that bought his curtains at Liberty's, and contrived this table, with its secret drawer.' Upon which he exhibited the secret drawer, now quite empty, to the admiration of his friend.

'I'll tell you what, the fellow must have been a forger, or a coiner, or something, like Jim the Penman, don't you know? Jim the Penman was a real character. I wonder, now, who this man was? Have you never got any clue?'

'Never,' said Bolton; 'he must have had the tastes of a gentleman, and the other fellow was a cad; oh, cad is not the word, he was a ruffian. I can't understand how they could belong to each other. This is the mystery of my little place, Harford. It has a story, you see.'

'A very droll story, too. I hope it won't bring you any botheration. It's a risky thing to come after any of these gentry. There might be stolen property concealed about: have you looked in all the corners?' Harford poked with his stick under the sofa, which was covered with its pretty hintz, 'or the fellow's chums might keep turning up. I suppose you like the fun of it; I shouldn't, if it were me.'

'Oh, I don't mind the fun of it,' said Bolton. 'There's a bit of adventure in it.' He did not tell his friend, however, of the chief quality it had, which was its cheapness; nor did he tell him of the letter, in which the chief point of the mystery lay. 'I don't suppose,' he said, recurring to the original question, 'that the governor knew. Grove takes a great deal upon him as chief of the office. I suppose he's done it out of his own head—'

'Yes, I suppose so,' the other replied; and they continued to discuss Grove till a somewhat late hour. When Harford went away at last, which was not till Jack Bolton was very tired of him, he was, or professed to be, frightened to go out by himself into the Gardens, where everything looked more strange and more unlike London than ever, in the uncertain light of a few lamps, and the fitful glimmer of the moon. 'You don't mean to say that's the Piccadilly we know? I don't believe it. I believe this is a village, somewhere, where travellers are murdered and their bodies flung into holes. Is that an assassin, or is it a policeman lurking round the corner? Thank heaven, it's a bobby, and I can venture out. But I wouldn't stop here, old man, if I were you. They'll take you up by mistake, and refuse to bail you if you go on staying here.'

'I'm not afraid: and I like the oddity of it,' said Bolton; but he was a little abashed by his friend's strictures, and stood looking out, with a depressing sense of the oddness of the place. The lamps were small and old-fashioned, and fluttered in the wind, and threw strange shadows of the stunted shrubs and broken pailings. There was not a soul about, for the gardens were exceptionally quiet at night, with a quietude which did not look serene. It looked not as if everybody was asleep, but as if everybody was out in some distant revel or orgie, leaving neglected children and misery behind. A good many of the inhabitants did steal back in twos and threes at late hours, letting themselves in in the silent hours, and a great many blinds were still down when Bolton went off to his office in the morning. He recollected suddenly that he had noticed that in the light of his friend's criticism. But this was not the worst, for Harford, next day, asked him how everybody was in Thieves' Gardens, and if the Burglary was very comfortable, in tones which brought down upon him a host of inquiries. The other clerks were delighted with such an easy joke, and made parties to go and visit him, declaring that they were afraid to go alone, and other pretty sayings of this kind, which made it difficult for Bolton to keep his temper, especially as he had not the slightest desire that they should come and see him. He clung to his quarters all the more; but he felt a little ashamed of them, as he had, indeed, been at first. And he had always an uncomfortable kind of

impression that some fine Sunday morning Jack, the fit hero of such a scene, would turn up again.

It was not till one day in December, after he had made a little visit, from Saturday till Monday, to his home, that Bolton took out the letter again. He had forgotten it more or less during the interval—sometimes altogether, sometimes with sudden touches of recollection. On this occasion he pulled it out along with something else for which he was looking. His visit at home had not been a cheerful one. His father was failing in health, growing old, wanting comforts and indulgences which it was very difficult to obtain. The end of life to a professional man who has not saved money is often very sad. The old man had ceased to be able to work, and he could not die. This meant the necessity of living on, with very little to live upon, and his children were none of them in a condition to help him. The family had not been a wise one. The sons, like Jack, had taken the bloom off those excellent prospects which, while Dr. Bolton was at the height of his practice, his boys had. The tradition of success was not in the family. Home, which had once been so genial and large, had dwindled gradually into a diminished, rather shabby, rather poor house, in Jack's recent experience. He would have liked to help them, but what could he do with so little? It was scarcely enough for himself.

It was while he was in this condition of mind that he took out the letter. It startled him to see the white envelope without any address, tumbling out from among the papers which he drew forth from their receptacle. It brought a gleam of something like amusement into the midst of very grave thoughts. He had never taken this letter seriously. It had been a kind of practical joke to take it away, to conceal it from the burglar brother, the real Jack to whom he had no doubt it had been addressed: the pleasure of an amusing mystification had mingled with the idea of taking a power which, no doubt, he would have used badly, out of the hands of that fellow. Whatever it was, he was sure to have used it badly. It was only in this light that the thing had appeared to Jack Bolton. To see it now gave him not only a little relief from his own pressing cares, but something of the same sense of amusement with which he had at first found it. He took it out of the envelope and read it again, with a smile at first; but the smile gradually died away from the corners of his mouth. For the first time it appeared to Bolton in a serious light. He grew a little pale, a cold air seemed to breathe over him. The 'Dear Jack,' which it was once more so difficult to realise did not mean himself, and the downright sincerity of the advice had something in it which affected him in a new way. A twenty-pound note. It would be very agreeable to have a twenty-pound note over and above his little pittance of a salary. He sat with the paper in his hand, and looked into the flame of his little lamp till it made his eyes water. If you ever want a twenty-pound note! Why, he always wanted it. A hundred even would not be too much, he said to himself, with a smile. He could do with a thousand. But as for twenty, it would be like water in the desert, like balm upon a wound. Twenty pounds: He would not mind night work for that. He would keep a tradesman's books even, as some fellows did, or copy papers, or write them—anything for a twenty-pound note at Christmas. He began to think what he would do with it if he could get it, in the idleness of his dreamy mood. He would take down ten pounds to Elsie, the good elder sister, who had never married, who stayed at home to take care of the old man; and with the other ten he would pay a trifle he owed, and buy himself a few trifles he wanted. What a difference it would make! He disposed of it in two or three ways, always, however, keeping the half for Elsie, while he leant over the table holding that paper in his hand. Nothing could be more justifiable, more honourable, than the way in which he would spend it. Folly! he said to himself briskly, pulling himself up, straightening out the paper to make it smooth and even, before he folded it away. Somehow the words that caught his eye seemed to him more weighty than before, and he stopped to read them over again to himself, half aloud. 'If ever you should be hard up, and want a twenty-pound note at Christmas.' If ever—why, what a joke it was!—as if he were not always hard up, and in want of twenty pounds—ready to do anything for it. And then, after all, there was so little to do. To write to G. C. and tell him all was safe up to this time. Why, yes, everything was quite safe, Bolton said to himself, with a laugh. G. C. might trust absolutely to his discretion. No doubt G. C. was a lawless person, over whose head some penalty was hanging; and it would be a good deed to get back from him a little of what he owed to a victimised public. The whole matter began once more to appear to Bolton in this amusing light. He could not think of it

seriously. It would be good fun, he thought, to do it; to obey the instructions, and see what would come of it. Probably nothing at all would come of it. Perhaps it was a mere sell, he said to himself. G. C., no doubt, was too old a bird to be caught with chaff. Still, it would be fun to try.

He put the envelope back into the book, but this time he did not forget it. He woke next morning, repeating to himself that it would be very good fun to try.

The chances, of course, were that nothing would follow. But it would be exciting to watch for the postman—no, not that—to go and ask at the post-office if there was a letter for J. B. He laughed out at the absurdity of this, at the whimsical chance that these should really be his own initials. They meant Jim Brown, perhaps, or Jim Barton, or any other equally unknown person. But, all the same, they meant Jack Bolton, fortunately, without the Barrington. He had a prejudice about the Barrington. He would not have mixed up that with any doubtful proceeding. But plain J. B. ran no risks; it was his name, and yet it was not quite his name. If anything embarrassing happened, he would always, always have a loophole by which to get out of it. But nothing was going to happen; he did not really mean to do it; nothing of the kind: why should he do it?—except, indeed, that it would be a great joke.

He kept thinking about it, however, all the time, turning it over in his mind, looking at it in all lights. After all, what harm would it do to send it? The unknown correspondent would certainly know the writing of the disappeared or deceased Jim. He would see it was a sell. Perhaps he would return an angry letter, asking what J. B. meant: in which case J. B. would be more discreet than ever, and would take great care not to explain. It would be great fun if that was how it ended. But if it were, by any chance, to end in another way? Why, then, to be sure, there would be something in the shape of an accompanying letter, which would explain, and the fun would grow fast and furious. All the way down to the office, and all the way back again, he kept turning it over. He avoided society and talk, in order to go on with this farce-romance of his own. There is nothing so entrancing as having a story unrolling itself day by day, which nobody knows of but yourself. The days went on, and he, with them, always working it out. The Gardens was rather a doleful place in winter. What was dust became mud, and the shrubs which were grey-green when they were in leaf, stuck up out of the hard ground, like the stalks of raisins, dry and bare. The houses looked more grimy than ever, with their blinds drawn partially down, and no windows open. Bolton began to have a horror of the place, and to think if he only had a little more money—and then his fancy would turn to that twenty pounds.

In the end, he sent the letter, copying out the sentence contained in Jim's enclosure, in a large, round, official-looking hand, and directing it, as ordered, to G. C., Poste Restante, The Hague, Holland. When he had done it, it seemed to take a weight off his mind. He felt it, at last, to be a disagreeable duty, which he had postponed as long as he could, but finally had got accomplished. 'Now, that's done,' he said to himself, with satisfaction, exulting as if it had been a duty, and not a joke at all. It is astonishing, when you have thought about them a great deal, how the aspect of things change.

And then there came in another excitement, which was little at first, but gradually grew in force. He scarcely was moved by it at all when he wrote; but as the days wore on, and the time came when the letter must be received by someone, his mind began to be haunted by speculations as to who G. C. might be, what kind of a fellow, what he would think when he received that communication, whether he would notice the change of the handwriting, and many a wonder more. But this was nothing to the rising tumult in his mind, when the time for the possible answer came. He did not go to the post-office on the first day. That would be too much to expect. To have a reply by return of post was quite improbable. Naturally, a man who has to send money is less exact than the man who hopes to receive it. Not that Bolton hoped to receive it, but to hear something about it, an explanation, or even an excuse. He had come to think that, though it was very unlikely he should get the money, an excuse was somehow owing him. He had a right to that, at least. On the second day he went to the post-office he had appointed, which was the South-Western, not quite the nearest, but yet not too far out of the way.

'A letter for J. B.?' 'No, there is no letter for J. B.,' the clerk said, with a little indignation in his tone, Jack Bolton thought, as if to say, How could you expect it? What right had you to a reply? And you know J. B. is not your name, the clerk's eyes seemed to say, sternly.

John Barrington Bolton went away subdued, as if he had been a culprit, as if he had been a mere Jack Brown. Not for twenty pounds, or more, would he have compromised his

Barrington. But he felt himself a poor creature without it, a man of no account in the eyes of the post-office clerk. And next day he did not go back to inquire. It seemed a very long day, and he kept on thinking about it, wondering: 'I wonder if the fellow ever got it. I wonder if it's lying, among hundreds of others, in the *poste restante*. (Bolton had been abroad, and remembered how they were piled each in its pigeon-hole.) I wonder if he thinks it best to take no notice. It's exceedingly rude to take no notice. By Jove, I'll make him notice my letter. He shall have another in a week, if he doesn't mind.' These were the thoughts that went through Bolton's brain, *crescendo*, increasing in volume and force. He was pale with excitement and anxiety when he went again on the fourth day. It was not the same clerk, which was a relief. At least, there would not be that cad staring at him, as if he knew all about it. Bolton went up to the mild, elderly man behind the railing, quite breathless with emotion.

'Any letter for J. B.?'

The amiable clerk looked up at him through his spectacles. 'A registered letter?' he said, with a smile; 'next window.'

A registered letter? Did he mean it as a question, or as a statement? Bolton had not so much as thought of a registered letter. He felt his throat close with a spasm and gasp. His mouth grew dry. He went to the next window with a stumbling step.

'A registered letter for J. B.?'

'Here it is. You oughtn't to leave registered letters lying for days at the post-office,' said the official, thrusting forth the bit of green paper to be signed as the receipt.

Bolton could scarcely hold the pen. But he did manage to scribble something, and with the light swimming in his eyes, took his letter. His letter! registered, with Dutch stamps on it, and the address, J. B., in plain, natural letters, as if it were the simplest thing in the world. He walked straight home to the Gardens, and went into his room, and carefully closed the door before he would open it. Then he tore the envelope open with a trembling hand.

Two ten-pound notes, packed up in a sheet of thin paper, carefully folded round them, folded square, like an old-fashioned letter, with creases and marks of agitated refolding, as of a person unaccustomed to such niceties. Bolton opened it out with consternation, in a panic of surprise and fright. He had never believed it for a moment. It was not a joke any longer. He grew pale and cold to his very finger tips. What had he done? What had he done? At first he thought the notes were enclosed in a piece of plain paper, but, on a second look, found some words in the middle of the sheet. They were as follows:—

'I have obtained this note with difficulty. I am thankful for assurance of safety. Adieu.—G.C.'

Bolton stared at this for a time, taking into his mind every turn of the shabbily-written words. The handwriting was that of an uneducated person. There was an air of naturalness, of reality, of a living human creature, suddenly stepping out of the unknown, without any sense of injury, without any sentiment of wrong. *Adieu*: There had been no good wish in the letter which Bolton had copied. The man who commended his correspondent to God must be a better man than he who demanded money from him, money to which he had no right. He sat and stared at it, and then he bent down his head upon the table, covering his face with his hands, and a burst of half hysterical crying, such as had never come upon him since he was a child, relieved his highly-strung feelings. It is scarcely needful to say that Bolton was profoundly ashamed of this the next moment, and dashed the tears from his eyes, and smothered the spasm that seized him, as if it had been a crime. And he got up and walked about the room, with cheeks burning with feverish shame. That he should have been such a weak fool! The thought of it drove out the other horrible thought. He ceased to remember that he had got another man's money on false pretences, in his consciousness of having made a fool of himself, a weak, ridiculous fool, crying like a girl! He walked about the room, stamping on the ground, shaking off this absurd convulsion, and by the time he had done so, and recovered himself, the horror of the wrong, of the wrongful acquisition, of the extraordinary event altogether, was more than half dissipated. He threw the notes and their cover into the secret drawer from which he had taken the other anonymous enclosure, with a kind of feeling that when the morning came he might find them turned to dry leaves, as in a fairy tale.

It was the first thought that occurred to him in the morning—as may be supposed. He jumped out of bed, and went into his sitting room, and touched the button, and opened the drawer. The two ten-pound notes lay there, perfectly real, not crisp and fresh, as if they had newly come from the bank, but soiled and creased, with names written across them, with the stamp of a Dutch hotel, where, no doubt, they had been received in payment of a bill. The

sight of them made a new revolution in Bolton's mind. He had no right to the money—probably nobody had any right to it: but he would, at least, use it well, which the other Jack would not have done. And, however much he might wish to restore it, he did not know where the other Jack was, nor did he know how to send it back. If he re-enclosed it to G. C., *Poste Restante*, The Hague, it would probably never reach its destination. What could he do—fling it into the abyss of the Post-office, to lie there for ages unclaimed, till the notes rotted—or—use it, as he was meant to do? The notes lay looking at him, inviting him to take them. Even when they are dirty, ten pound notes are pleasant things. No harm in them, but a great deal of good: Ease of mind, a little pleasure, which, indeed, Jack Bolton felt he had a right to, having been very virtuous of late. And one of them was for Elsie, sacredly devoted to Elsie, whose touch alone would purify them from evil.

He waited for some time, looking at them, thinking over all those things, and then he put out his hand and took them. By that time the wonder had ceased, and he did not feel that there was so very much out of the way about those pieces of stamped papers in which so many pleasant things were enclosed.

So Jack Bolton pocketed and used—for the best of purposes—the notes intended for J. B.

(To be continued.)

Momens Musicals.

THE anniversary of Schubert's death (at Vienna, Nov. 19th, 1828), was commemorated on Saturday at the Crystal Palace, by one of the finest orchestral concerts it has ever been my good fortune to hear. The programme, which, with the exception of Herr Franz Neruda's violoncello selection, was entirely derived from the Master's works, commenced with an overture in E minor, in all likelihood never before given in this country. Though by no means equal to that 'In the Italian Style,' or the still finer one to 'Rosamunde,' with which, indeed, for ear-haunting loveliness, it cannot be compared, the new work is yet full of charm and vigour; clear and (for Schubert) unusually concise; and rich in dainty tit-bits of orchestral combination. Herr Neruda came forward with a composition of his own, a Concertstück for 'cello and orchestra, superior in musical interest to most productions of the kind. Its themes have a quaint Scandinavian character; and, though displaying little power, are never trivial. Unfortunately, the orchestra is rather poorly handled, and the effect of the piece as a whole was tame. Its excellent interpretation, however, secured a cordial reception. With regard to the rest of the concert, a general summary will be preferable to detail, since any attempt to describe phenomenal excellence involves the risk of a dilemma. I might easily fail to do justice to my theme, while success would certainly give rise to accusations (from those, at least, who were not present) of exaggeration. Mrs. Henschel's merits, indeed, are now well-known. She was heard in four of Schubert's exquisite songs, and as, in three of these, her husband (an accompanist probably without rival) was at the piano, the perfect result attained will not be thought astonishing. But that performance by the orchestra of the great Symphony in C, and of the Entr'acte and ballet music from *Rosamunde*! 'Ballet' music, indeed! I should like to see the dancers worthy of it! As to the Symphony, it was quite a relief to think that nothing else was to follow. Every man played as though inspired; and could poor Schubert but have heard (perhaps he did—who knows?) he must have felt that even his earthly troubles were no great matter, after all.

These are the names of the artists at the Patti concert given in the fog on Wednesday at the Albert Hall: there were Adelina Patti, and Trebelli and Miss Hamlin; Miss Harrison, the minstrels Piercy, Santley, Lloyd, Bisaccia; and the troubadour L. Engel, and the London Vocal Union, and Van Bieze should have joined them, but, alas! he couldn't find them, and he telegraphed in consequence to say so. Dr. Engel made a speech, said that much as she regretted, as the fog had caught her throat, the Diva couldn't grant encores. Yet she gave one all the same (it, of course, was 'Home, Sweet Home')—so the audience felt they hadn't come for nothing!

The London Symphony Concerts will no doubt improve as they go on. Mr. Henschel seemed on Tuesday hardly in touch with his band, for he drove them with military precision all through the Symphony and the overtures to Tannhauser

But here's my lawyer telling me that, if it comes to trial,
As a defence those horrid Courts won't take a mere denial.
The *Standard* and the *Times* and all their faith to me refuse,
But still I've got old Stead's *Gazette*, still hold the *Daily News*;

And, in my tracks, through falsity's mendacious billows
flopping,
These two will cry aloud and say, 'Let be! 'tis only
dopping.'

But, it strikes me, their denial by some proof should be
supported,

People don't think much of Stead, and then it's been so
much reported,

And it's been confessed by Stuart, I don't wish to raise
dissension,

But, of course! I can repudiate a culpable intention.

Here I am then, 'the idea never crossed my mind,' that's
topping!

There I have him, for he can't prove that. Goodbye then,
Colonel Dopping.

THE STORY OF AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

By MRS. OLIPHANT.

CHAPTER III.

THAT was a curious Christmas to Jack Bolton. He changed the two soiled and much-folded notes into clean and bright sovereigns. With the half of them he paid his little debts, according to the calculation which he had hastily made when it first occurred to him how pleasant it would be to have a twenty-pound note; and when Christmas arrived he went home with ten gold pieces in a little roll of paper, for Elsie, in his waistcoat pocket. But for having that present to give to Elsie he would not, perhaps, have gone home for Christmas, for the old house was far from gay, with the ailing father, often very querulous and irritable, and Elsie so patient and good, fading and growing grey. The house which had once been so full, sheltering them all, and echoing with their voices, their games, and laughter, was now deadly quiet, and the silence of it in the evening, when the shutters were closed and everything tried to look comfortable, went to Jack's heart. It is general to talk about these home visits at Christmas as if they were always cheerful and delightful, full of warmth and affection. But it is not always so. Elsie cried with pleasure when her brother arrived. She was never tired of repeating to him that it made such a difference to her—all the difference in the world to her; but, nevertheless, she was greatly at a loss how to make the day pass pleasantly to him, how to keep it cheerful, to hide from him the fact that father grew feebler and more trying every day, and that the decay of life and fortune were very sad things—things so sad that they will not change their aspect even for Christmas. None of the others came to help these two to bear it. The elder brothers and sisters were married, and had their own households to think of. Jim and Harry, the younger ones, might perhaps have come home if they had made the effort; but they knew just what sort of Christmas it would have been had they come, and they stayed away. Jack went to church by himself in the morning. When the bells were ringing, and Elsie had her bonnet on to go with him, a message came from her father's room that she was wanted, and the bonnet had to be taken off again, and Jack to go alone. He did not go to church, perhaps, so often as he ought, and he was more chilled than cheered in the cold corner of the pew which had once been so full, among all the bristling hollies and evergreens. He had forgotten the people about, and they had forgotten him. Two or three stopped to ask him whether Dr. Bolton was worse this morning, as Elsie was not at church, with an evident confusion in their minds as to whether he was Jack or Jim. And he felt that he had no part in the cheerful greetings, and all the pleasant talk at the church door about the beauty of the decorations and the Christmas anthem, and the delightful service. He was afraid, he owned to himself, that he had not found the service delightful. He wondered if any one thought, in the pulpit or in the picture-papers, or in their Christmas talks, of houses to which

Christmas brings no particular charm, which are rather duller than usual on that day, which makes everybody think of the past and the friends that are gone. In the afternoon, after the early Christmas dinner—the turkey which Elsie had managed to provide for the festival—she became painfully anxious that he should enjoy himself, and not find it dull. She suggested that he should take a walk and get the benefit of the country air; or go and make a call at the Vicarage, where everybody, she was sure, would be glad to see him. Had he not been there, she would have accepted the dull afternoon as the natural thing, and perhaps shed a silent tear or two, but made the best of it—whereas it was painful to see how she would not let her brother alone, but kept suggesting one thing after another to amuse him, in her wistfulness and anxious desire to do everything she could.

But, as a matter of fact, it was not amusing. Dr. Bolton was annoyed not to have his usual paper, and those which John had brought, with all their pictures and Christmas articles, were too big, too slippery, too multitudinous for his comfort. They were full of stories instead of the news he loved—he kept letting them fall, turning them over with impatience, vainly trying to find his place. The rustling of the papers and his peevish exclamations were the only sounds inside—and without there was a dull drizzle of rain. It was very dull. The pudding, with its little flame of burnt brandy, did not suffice to throw any reflection of happiness upon the three who sat together, the remains of what was once a joyous family. Only Elsie tried to talk. The doctor struggled with his papers, and cried 'Confound them, how they slip about!' or, 'Confound it, where's the next page!' while Jack sat with his legs stretched out before the fire, and his hands in his pockets. He would have liked to think that he was enjoying himself; but it was in reality very dull, duller even than he had thought.

The best moment he had was when he gave to Elsie the little packet of sovereigns, made into a little roll. She was altogether taken by surprise. A sudden rose-light of emotion flushed on her pale face, making it look once more pretty and young. 'This for me!' she cried, with almost a scream of astonishment. And then 'Oh, Jack, but I can't take it—I can't take it! You must have been pinching yourself to give me this. Oh, dear Jack, thank you a thousand times. I have got all the good of it in knowing that you wanted me to have it. I could not buy anything with it that would be so delightful to me as that. But, indeed, I don't want it. I can do very well without anything. Take it back—take it back, dear Jack. It's blessed money, it has done me more good than anything for many a year.'

'I won't take it back,' said John Bolton. 'It's my pleasure to bring it to you; I shouldn't have come otherwise. Promise to spend it upon yourself for once. It is yours, and only yours.'

'Oh, Jack, dear Jack!' she cried, with the tears running down her cheeks. She held the money in her hand, and looked at it as if it had been a wonder of the earth. 'I haven't had a pound that was mine, that I could do what I liked with, for five years,' she said. It was just five years since she had given up the situation she had as a governess, and come home to be her father's nurse and companion. It had been considered by all the family as the right thing for Elsie to do—the only thing for her to do—a matter of course—her simple duty: nobody reflecting that Elsie's duty was no more than that of any other of the family, and that to save themselves by making a sacrifice of her was what they had no right to do. She would have been the last to think so; but she was so little used to be considered that John's present seemed to be the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to her; and his goodness beyond all words. 'You must have denied yourself everything to save up all this money. Oh, Jack, I don't feel that I ought to take it, for all you say,' she cried.

'I haven't denied myself. It was a—windfall. I've got something in my pocket still,' he said, with a half laugh. 'Put it away, and don't say any more about it, Elsie. So here's Christmas over and done with—and a good thing, too. And I must get back with the first train to-morrow. I have things to do—in my own place.'

'Oh, Jack, you are doing private work, wearing yourself out. I know that's what your windfall means. And, oh, you've had a dull, dull Christmas! I wish I could have done anything to make it more like old times.'

'No duller for me than for you,' he said: 'I didn't expect to be gay. I'm going to bed now, and I'm very glad the day's over. There's too much of old times in it. We can't do the Christmas-carol business as they did in Dickens's time.' That seemed already a long period to Jack Bolton. He kissed his sister, sincerely glad to have done her a pleasure, and still more to think that the day sacred to home duty and old tradition was over. The Christmas-carol business, as the

young man called it, was no longer effective in the old doctor's house.

To Elsie it was different: for all the religion of Christmas was in her tender soul, out of which the natural thoughts of herself and her own interests had been emptied by strain of necessity and by the grace of God. She could be glad in the depths of her heart for that which the carol-singers proclaimed, without much thinking of it, outside the windows. 'Remember Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas day—' even while she felt like John, thankful that the day was over, which brings so many recollections. But the tears she shed as she said her prayers—thinking of the mother dead and the children scattered who had made that house so lively which now was dull as house could be—were softer than usual, infinitely sweetened by the conviction of her brother's kindness and love, and the heavenly sense, the woman's paradise, that he must be doing well, living well, working well, fulfilling all his duties, or he could not have brought this blessed money to her—the dear, generous fellow. Elsie would have given her life cheerfully for Jack, or the labour of her life, without thinking twice; but she thought that ten pounds a piece of generosity, of unspeakable goodness and kindness, such as no brother had ever done for a sister before.

John was relieved when he got away. London, to a man who has no home in it, and not many friends, is apt to be dull at Christmas; but the thought of that endless, dutiful, home-day, with its unbroken quiet, made the very roar of the streets delightful. If he could have done anything, indeed—but there was nothing for him to do—he could neither take Elsie's work upon himself, nor be of any use to her in it. He thought of the little gratifications which his ten pounds might, perhaps, get for her, with pleasure, and almost pride. He had really forgotten by this time that there was anything out of the way about it. He had not been disappointed in his expectations of the pleasure to be got out of that money. It made him blush a little to remember what his sister had said—that he must have pinched himself; that it must mean evening work. He half wondered what she would say if she knew; but dismissed that subject. It was a—windfall. It would be blessed money, as she had said, in Elsie's hands; but as for where it came from, why, he did not know, and could not give back, even if he tried. And by this time it had almost gone out of his memory that there was anything so very much out of the way about it at all.

It was a few months after this, in the cold spring, when an East wind made even Piccadilly as grey and dusty as a country road, that John received another visit from that uncomfortable namesake of his, whom it had so much amused and pleased him to baulk. One evening when he came home, the days having grown so much longer that it was not yet dark when he returned from the office, he found Mrs. Matthews sniffing and crying at the door of his room, and all the furniture within in confusion. The drawers of the writing-table were all open; his papers pulled about, his books overturned; confusion reigning everywhere. Bolton walked into his own room, thus turned upside down, with the greatest amazement. 'What is the meaning of this?' he said.

'Oh, sir, it ain't no fault of mine,' sobbed Mrs. Matthews. 'He would come in, whatever I could say. I told him as you would be drefful angry, and he said he didn't care a— Oh! Mr. Bolton, sir, whatever you do, don't blame me!'

'Blame you! Why, who's to blame then?' cried Jack; 'if there's a man here turning over my things, you'd better call the police at once. Where is the fellow?'

As he spoke, the man whom he had seen before—the burglar, the prizefighter—suddenly appeared in the doorway of Jack's bedroom. He looked even more repulsive than he had done on his first visit; his hair was cut close to his head, in a style adopted in certain establishments of her Majesty's service. He was very clean-shaved, a process which had brought out in greater emphasis the savage and brutal jaw, and the coarse and bloated outline of his lower face. He had a shade over one eye, and the other looked out under frowning brows, full of truculent meaning. It filled John Bolton with sudden fury to see such an apparition at his own bedroom door.

'Who are you callin' a feller? It's you as is the feller. If the p'leece comes, it's you as I'll hand over. I've come to look for what's my own.'

'You confounded scoundrel,' said Jack. 'How dare you break into my rooms? You'd better get out of this at once, before anyone comes, or I'll take the law in my own hands.'

'Oh, gentlemen!' said Mrs. Matthews, 'don't ye, now; don't ye fight in my place. I've always kept a good character, though the Gardens is against it. Oh, Mr. Bolton, don't ye, now, make a row in my ouse.'

'You shouldn't have let a fellow like that into your house,' said Jack, breathing hard with passion.

'Come on, then,' cried the other Jack. 'I ain't afeared of you. Don't make a fuss, old woman. I'll soon give him one as 'll make him quiet enough.'

A burglar and ticket-of-leave man has a freedom of action which is not permitted to a respectable clerk. The other Jack had a weight and size which exceeded by a good deal the slim proportions of John Bolton, and our young man had not that superior science or command of the art of self-defence which every man has in a novel. He was not afraid of his opponent, but he recognised clearly the possibility of being beaten by him; and he was as unwilling to have a row in his rooms as Mrs. Matthews could be. It took him a great effort to keep down his passion, but he managed to do so in sudden reflection upon all these things.

'What do you want here?' he said. 'Who gave you any right to come here? Get out of the place first, and then I'll listen to what you have to say.'

'It ain't your valuables,' said the fellow, with a laugh, 'not worth five bob, they ain't, not the whole of 'em.' Jack, the ruffian, had reflected, too, and, on the whole, thought it desirable not to get within speaking distance of a constable. He came out into the centre of the sitting room. 'I want something as my brother left—it's stealing to keep a thing as well as to prig a thing. I want some papers as Jim left. He left 'em in that there secret drawer ——.'

'Is that why you looked for them in my bedroom? Call the nearest policeman, Mrs. Matthews. You rummaged the secret drawer in my presence,' said John Bolton, with dignity. 'You took away everything that was there. Do you think more have grown since, or got into my bedroom? No; I'm not afraid of you. Get out of my place, and talk to the policeman; if you think you are aggrieved he will tell you what to do; but you shan't remain here.'

'I'd like to see who'll put me out,' said the ruffian, glaring upon John Bolton, with his one furious eye. But it was evident he had no intention of showing fight. John followed him, step by step, as he edged away, always with his hand clenched and ready to hit out, and letting fall a string of choice oaths which it is unnecessary to record. 'By —, I'll have the law of you, I will, you — hypocrite. I'll have a search warrant, and turn out all your beggarly boxes, d— me if I dont. Not worth a fellow's while to take away, they ain't, not a — thing that's worth twopence. Oh, you're a gentleman, you are. Why don't you kick me downstairs? That's what you'd like to do, if you dared.'

'So I should,' said John, 'and will, if you don't mind. I don't want to have a row, but you'd better reflect if it wouldn't be worse for you than for me.'

'Oh, you're blanked cool, you are,' the fellow said, withdrawing by inches. Mrs. Matthews went before, sobbing all the way, and John followed after, taking a step for every one of his visitor's, his fist ready, too. The encounter would not have been an equal one, but his blood was up, and he was quite disposed for it. It was almost a disappointment to him when, dropping an imprecation with every step, the burglar clamped down the narrow stairs, growling all the way. John stood on the top of the stairs, till his voice and steps gradually died away. He was throbbing all over with excitement, his pulses going like hammers, his nerves strung. He would have given a great deal to have let himself out, to have struck the fellow, flung him out of the window, or kicked him downstairs, as he said. But perhaps it was more prudent not to have done so. He shut his door, and sat down to recover his breath when the man was gone. It was a process which took him some time, and he was so angry that, when he sat down to think upon it, he had almost jumped up and followed the fellow to punish him. It seemed intolerable that he should have come here, and rummaged through all Jack's sacred places, and filled the air of the room with his odious presence, and yet go away without a hurt. This was a bitter pill to John; but, afterwards, he was very glad that there had been no row—a row is a terrible thing for a young man of the respectable middle-class. All Englishmen dread a scene; but to those who have no position to carry it off, a row is something even worse. To have his affairs talked about, his name mentioned in the paper as appearing at a police-court; to encounter all the questions of the office, and probably to be interviewed by the chief as to how this unlucky incident came about. John soon felt that, on the whole, it was better even that the burglar should escape without the punishment he deserved, so long as there should be no row.

The excitement of this occurrence, and the disgust and indignation with which he put back all his drawers into their places, and re-arranged his possessions, after setting all the windows and doors open to get rid of the atmosphere of Jack, the burglar, were perhaps the reasons why John Bolton never put the question to himself whether his namesake, Jack,

had not, after all, some case against him. This did not so much as occur to him until the evening, when he saw his writing-book pushed up into a corner, as if thrown aside in the heat of the search. Ah, there it was! He had not thought of it till now, nor remembered the enclosure that lay there, nor all it had led to. He caught himself up, so to speak with that exclamation, as his eyes fell on the book. Ah! had Jack rummaged through that, too? Had he found or missed the document which—the letter that—? John pulled himself up. He gave vent to a short laugh. He did not feel guilty, or experience any of the sensations which a man ought to feel who had deceived his fellow, or appropriated the property of others. His only thought was, what a good thing, what an excellent thing, that it had not fallen into that ruffian's hands! He had been the means of preserving it from Jack. Perhaps he forgot, in the strain of the moment, that he had profited by it himself. To have saved somebody from Jack was the leading idea in his mind. After a moment, he looked over the contents of the book with much care, to see that all was safe. In the very depths of the pocket he found the letter, which had not been disturbed. He took it up and looked at it, with a smile on his face. What a good thing he had saved it from Jack! Then he considered the chances of the fellow doing what he said, turning up again. It was not very likely, but, still, it was possible. He took out the letter, and read it over once more. He knew it by heart. Every word, even the little flourishes of the pen after the initials, were imprinted on his memory. He hesitated a moment, then raised it to the flame of the candle, and slowly burnt it, with a sense of satisfaction. It curled away into a flame, a red glow, finally a film of black. He watched it die out, till this crackling film finally lay a few rags of blackness in the little tray which he used for the ashes of his cigarette, and then he breathed a sigh of relief. It was all over. The letter could never be found now if it were sought for under all the search warrants in the world. So much for Burglar Jack! But still the respectable John felt no trouble of conscience about the fact that he had possessed himself of a paper that belonged to another man.

Another curious incident, which, however, he never thought of as in any way bearing upon this portion, or indeed any portion, of his own life, happened in the same spring, at a period a little more advanced, in short, after the season had begun—when Piccadilly once more resounded with the wheels, and glowed with the brightness of that fullest life of London which comes in May. Golden Gardens showed a little sympathy with the season. The shrubs, which had been like dried stalks of raisins, burst into a pugnacious leafage, despite of everything that dust could do to stifle them. The creepers on the walls grew greenish, too—the china roses began to 'show for flower,'—social life revived, and the mothers and wives of the locality came out and talked about the doors, and the children shrieked and shouted, with shrill, little town voices, from which the soft air took the harshness. On a Sunday, John Bolton was lazy in the morning, as has been already said. He dined, breakfasted, got ready to go out, in the most leisurely way, reading a little from time to time, sometimes going to the window to look out, observing in a luxurious way all that was going on. He was looking out in his shirt-sleeves, with a great want of ceremony, although his window was open, at the scene below, easily amused, as a man is when he has plenty of time, and nothing to hurry him—when something happened which made him withdraw very timidly, with something like a blush upon his face. He certainly grew hot all over, and retreated with great expedition, and caught his coat and put it on, with a look which was half alarmed and half ashamed. In a few minutes he began to laugh at himself for his fright, but in an abashed way, and stole back to the window, fully dressed, but sheltering himself behind that curtain from Liberty's, which began to grow faded. The cause of this commotion was very simple, and yet it produced a great effect below as well as above. The women at the doors turned their heads all in one direction, to stare. The men at the corner nudged each other, and one of them took his pipe out of his mouth; a group of children stopped playing and shrieking, to look after her. Yes; this was what it was—a young lady walking up the central path of the Gardens, examining, with a very keen, bright look of observation, the houses on either side.

She walked up to the end, and then she turned back. Who was she? Her dress was the plainest possible black cashmere, fitting her like a glove, a little, black hat, with a trimming of a modest description in conformity with the fashion, and tan gloves. Anybody might have worn that simple costume, a duke's daughter or her maid, or a shop-girl—we mean a young lady—from Swan and Edgar's. Perhaps it was her way of walking, which was pretty, and her eager, bright look, and the entire and total difference between her trim and exquisite neatness and everything around, that made

such an impression on everybody. Who could she be? What did she want? For whom was she looking? for that she was looking for somebody was very apparent. She had looked up at John's window as she passed, and observed him as he stood there in his shirt sleeves—good heavens, *in his shirt-sleeves!* He watched her very shamefaced, as she came back again, and so did the men at the corner and the women at the doors. What could she want in the Gardens? She came down more slowly, looking about her with glances less confident, more inquiring, half-pausing now and then, as if she would have asked a question. As she reached the road in front of his house, John drew further and further back, watching her behind the curtain. There could be no doubt that she gave a longer inspection to it than she had done to any other, gazing as if she would penetrate the very walls, and draw forth the man in the shirt-sleeves, and have him executed at her feet. John shrank closer to the wall, in alarm. She looked at the house as if she would note all its peculiarities, and then, with slow steps and a thoughtful look, she finally walked away.

What did it mean? It was not till he had taken a long walk and diverted his mind by the sight of Rotten Row, and all the idlers in the Park, that it occurred to John Bolton that probably it meant nothing at all, and that the visitor to the Gardens was moved by mere passing curiosity and wonder to see so odd a place in such a neighbourhood: or perhaps she had come to look for somebody—an old servant—one of the people who exercised out-of-the-way industries: the people who stuffed birds, or the people who mended lace. She had not found them, evidently, whoever she was looking for. John did not go home till the afternoon, when most of the people in the Gardens had floated away on their different pursuits of relaxation. He went in, in expectation of a comrade who came to see him occasionally on Sunday afternoons. But when he got within the little, ragged, village street he started as if he had seen a ghost, and felt, indeed, very much as if that experience had happened to him. There she was, once more, walking in that quiet, firm, energetic way, down the disorderly line of the Gardens. He stared at her, he could not help it, though he knew it was not civil; and then a more wonderful thing still happened to John. He stood at his own garden door, staring, almost gaping, at this wonderful apparition, when, suddenly, he became aware that, with a little impulse of swiftness, an impetuous movement, she had changed her course, pausing, he thought, as if she had touched her own rudder, just as she would have done had she been a boat and not a young lady, and was coming towards him with the intention of speaking to him. He stopped by an answering movement, turning round towards her, frightened, yet flattered, he could not tell why. She went up to him, with a little air of command. 'Are you Mr. Brunner?' she said.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

HOW WOMEN CAN ACT WITHOUT VOTES.

To the Editor of THE COURT AND SOCIETY REVIEW.

SIR,—It is an acknowledged fact that the women of England are a powerful element now at work in the political questions and conflicts of the day; and surely there is still something which they might accomplish as a body for the good of their country in this crisis of its commercial history. To the women of England the appeal lies. The cry for some sort of protection is beginning to go up from the 'masses.' They feel now the shoe pinches, that Free-trade is *not* the poor man's friend, and all are realising that the time has come when something must be done to set us on equal terms with the other nations of the world, and when we must no longer be made ridiculous, as we are, by the way foreign goods are welcomed to our shores. To the women of England may belong the honour of inaugurating a movement towards this great end. If they would bind themselves by a promise not to decorate their houses, adorn their persons, or cover their table with *manufactured* goods from foreign countries, a wonderful impetus to British trade would be the speedy result, and at what loss or sacrifice to themselves? Surely almost imaginary! There are factories at home for the manufacture of nearly everything that appears in our markets; there are vast establishments where everything that is artistic in fabric or fashion can be obtained. But English people are not true-hearted in this matter. We must see and recognise that a good honest English name over some emporium of fashion, or stamped upon our goods will not *take*; so, forsooth, Miss Jones, Brown, or Robinson must forthwith trade as *Mdile*. Rose, Blanc, or Noir, and then orders flock in and custom is brisk. Yet there are many firms in London, trading as Englishmen, whose

not all be aware of the nature of this "strengthening," and many may possibly picture to themselves Herat as a miniature Metz of the East. To such it may be of interest to learn that the extent of improvements effected was:—*Item*, the removal of an old mosque, which interfered with the defences; *item*, the erection of some mud walls; *item* (and this was announced from India with a due flourish of trumpets) the despatch thither of a battery of 14lb. smooth-bore guns, which would be easily dismounted by a Russian mountain battery in the space of half-an-hour. Truly there was method in madness which, if it sent weapons useless for purposes of defence, at least sent such as could by no possibility be utilised against ourselves by an enemy, into whose hands they are assuredly destined to fall ere long.

'Reverting once more to the views set forth in the article above referred to, I note with regret some most undeserved and misleading strictures upon the Native army in India. In his estimate of the value of these troops the writer apparently eliminates as worthless all save the Ghoorkas and a few Bengal cavalry regiments, who alone, he says, could be "placed in line against an European army." Now that wholesale condemnation is indignantly repudiated by all who have any practical acquaintance with the races from which our Native regiments are recruited. The Madraseses may be inferior soldiers, and the Marathas may have lost much of their old martial spirit; but to deny the soldierly qualities of Sikhs and Pathans, Punjabis and Rajputs is to fly in the face of fact and history. "It is easier to be critical than correct," but it would have scarcely been a hard matter for the writer to have avoided such an inaccuracy as that.'

THE STORY OF AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

By MRS. OLIPHANT.

CHAPTER IV.

'MR. BRUNNER,' said John, with a smile. There is always something more or less absurd in being taken for another person. 'Oh, no! My name is Barrington Bolton—if I can be of any use to you'—he added, after a moment.

'Ah!' Her countenance changed a great many times in the course of this short interval. It was a wonderfully expressive little face—a flush of expectation, a shadow of disappointment. Then something like satisfaction came over it in successive waves. 'Ah!' she repeated, with a little sigh, 'I thought it could not be you.'

She spoke with a slight foreign accent, which to John seemed very pretty. He could not identify what it was—not French, he thought. She did not look French. He thought—and as he was altogether homebred, it was the highest compliment he could pay her—that she looked like nothing but an English girl. He stood looking at her, uncertain what to do, for she did not pass on, as it was natural to suppose she would when her question was answered, but paused and hesitated, looking at him as if she had something more to ask, and did not know how.

'Can I help you in any way?' said John. 'You are looking for someone? I think you must surely be mistaken. This is not the sort of place where anyone could live—whom you would know.'

She looked at him again, still hesitating. 'But you live here,' she said. 'You are—a gentleman.'

It is impossible to tell how much this pleased John; it brought a warm flush of gratification to his face. 'More or less,' he said, in an Englishman's self-detracting way. 'But, all the same, it is not a place for you.'

She gave a glance round, and nodded her head, regretfully, as it seemed. 'Yes, I am looking for someone—Brunner—a little Dutch, but chiefly English.'

'Someone you know?' said Bolton, with instinctive jealousy, forgetting that she had asked him if this was his name.

'No—I do not know the man—he is an enemy. I am Dutch too—Hollandaise. I am governess with a family. I have only a little time in London. I thought if I could but find him'—

She clasped her hands, but whether that implied a prayer or a threat John could not tell. 'It is for my father,' she added, after a momentary pause.

'Mademoiselle,' said John. He felt as if he had invented this title, and as if it were very clever to have done so. 'If you will tell me what sort of person he is I will make every inquiry; he shan't escape me if he is here.'

'Oh, you are so very good!' cried the girl. Her hands unclasped and moved towards him as if they would have taken his in a quiet clasp of gratitude. Then she drew back a little, with an equally quiet blush.

'Perhaps I ought not to give you trouble—but if you could—if you would'—

'I both will and can,' said John.

'Thanks, thanks, a thousand thanks.' She paused again, with that wavering of hesitation which John thought so pretty, and then, with something that looked like a sudden shock of alarm, said, 'Good-bye' hurriedly, and went away.

He stood looking after her till she had disappeared out of the Gardens, which looked more desolate and shabby than ever, now that she was gone. Then he returned thoughtfully to his rooms. He did not attempt to follow her, which would have been ungentlemanly. Looking after her was bad enough. He would not betray the little involuntary trust she had put in him for anything in the world. He went up to his window, and sat down there, looking out vaguely on the road where she had been standing a few minutes ago. How very strange that she should have stood there, such a girl as that. There was a line, surely, that glimmered and shone all up the path, showing where she had walked in the morning. He thought he could find the trace, every step. No, he was not actually so idiotic as to *think* this. He merely felt it, as if it were something quite ascertained and certain. And it now occurred to him to ask himself how he was to communicate to her any information he could get about Brunner, or whatever the fellow's name was; that he neither knew her name nor her address, nor anything about her. Yes, he knew a great deal about her. He knew that she was Dutch, and governess in a family that were for a short time in London. Not out of his sphere, therefore! by no means out of his sphere; not a despair, as if she had been the daughter of a Duke or an Earl. John went on for a long time thinking about her, thinking of the changes of her face, and the movement of her hands as if to take hold of his—of her little step back when she perceived what she had been about to do. He forgot to ring for his lamp. He did not even observe that it was growing dark, in the pleasure of going over it all again, over and over, without tiring. Mrs. Matthews startled him greatly by suddenly bringing into the dark room, projecting the light before her, as she pushed the door open, the revelation of that lamp.

'Oh—ah—lights. To be sure, I had forgotten—yes, yes, of course, I want the lamp.'

'I didn't know but you might be hout, sir,' Mrs. Matthews said.

'Oh, dear no—set it down—I had only—forgotten. Mrs. Matthews, did you ever hear of anyone of the name of Brunner in the Gardens? Take care, for goodness sake—what are you doing with the lamp?'

'I didn't see as—as—as there was a book on the table, sir! I had nigh upset it—and then the place would have been all alight in a moment. And there ain't no worse place in London for a fire than the Gardens. For, bless us, it give me such a turn—they'd have been in a blaze like a matchbox.'

'Well, well—now mind; you saved yourself in time.'

'Oh, sir, it's to be seen you don't know what nerves is,' cried Mrs. Matthews, fixing her hand upon her heart.

'Fortunately for me,' said John. 'Sit down and recover yourself. Would you like a glass of wine?'

'Well, sir,' said Mrs. Matthews, hesitating. She knew her lodger had nothing but a little claret, and she had no opinion of such cold trash. She added, with more firmness, 'No, Mr. Bolton, I don't hold with wine—not till bedtime, Sir—when I allow as a little drop—hot'—

'But you have not answered my question—Brunner—you don't know anyone of the name of Brunner in the Gardens? It is not a common name. Indeed, I believe it's a kind of foreign name—Dutch or German.'

'There's foreigners from time to time in the Gardens, sir,' said Mrs. Matthews, with a grave face, 'but I never have anything to say to such folks.'

'They may be very respectable, though they are foreigners,' said John.

'Well, sir, maybe as they may, but I keeps myself to myself. Now as I think on't,' she added, after a moment, 'I ain't sure but there was once at number fifteen some foreign folks as went by that kind of name. The man was terrible stout, like as he'd burst, and the woman she was—would that be the folks, Mr. Bolton? No children, but numbers of other foreign folks about, as it is them people's ways.'

'I don't know anything about them. It was a man who was wanted. Did you say at number fifteen?'

'Oh, they ain't there now, sir; been gone this six years or more,' Mrs. Matthews said, eagerly.

'I really can't tell; you might get what information you can about them, and inquire anywhere in the Gardens if you

can hear of any such person,' said John. 'Foreign or half-foreign name, Brunner—a man only. Will you inquire for me, Mrs. Matthews? You can do it better than I.'

'That I will, sir,' said the woman, with enthusiasm; 'anything as I can do for you, Mr. Bolton; for you're the best lodger, sir, I do believe, as a poor woman ever had.'

'What!' said John, with a laugh; 'better than my predecessor, who left you all his furniture? Come, you can't make me believe that.'

The lamp gave an odd light against the glimmer of a young hazy London moon, which had just risen over the roofs, in a dissipated way. And Mrs. Matthews, poor woman, had not yet recovered from that shock to her nerves. There seemed to John a queerish hue upon her face as she told him he would always have his joke. John was quite unconscious of any joke, but he let her have her way.

She brought him a great deal of irrelevant information afterwards about the people in the Gardens, and an elaborate account of Mrs. Browning (would that perhaps be the name, sir?), the lace-maker, and Nemudri, who played the violoncello at one of the small theatres. 'They two is the nearest to it,' said Mrs. Matthews; 'there ain't no such name in the Gardens, or was.' John made some researches of his own, independent of his landlady, but came to no other result. The name of Brunner was not to be heard of. He was disappointed, for he had a romantic feeling about the inquiry, as if he was a knight redressing a lady's wrong. She had said, with a flash from her dark eyes, 'He is an enemy,' and that was enough to fill John with thoughts of eating Brunner's heart in the market-place. To think this man could not be found, and that he had failed in the commission she had entrusted to him was grievous indeed. He questioned all the shopkeepers about; he asked the postman, most sure of intelligencers, but neither his efforts nor those of Mrs. Matthews produced any results. He felt much mortified and lessened in his own eyes by a failure so complete.

It was only when John had fully realised the defeat of his efforts in a matter which at first sight had seemed so simple, that he realised that, had he made the most important of discoveries, he had absolutely no means of communicating it. He knew nothing about the girl who had made him her agent—neither her name, nor who she was, nor anything whatever about her. She was Dutch, a governess temporarily resident in London with her 'family,' and had an enemy called Brunner. At the first moment it had seemed to John that he had a great deal of information—in short, that he knew her, her nature and character, and all about her, as well as if he had known her all his life. There were a great many people whom he had known all his life who had never produced any such effect upon him. He had but to close his eyes at any moment, and she rose before him like a picture—nay, more real than a picture—her very self, with that alert air, those eyes so bright yet so soft, and that indescribable proud freedom of a perfectly pure-minded and modest girl, who has no fear of being misconstrued, but can meet frankly any sympathetic and honourable look without an instant realisation, or, indeed, any realisation at all, of the penalties of sex. Another sort of girl might have been doubted or smiled at for addressing a young man in the street—but she! John felt himself turn red and hot all over at the mere idea that she might not have spoken to, appealed to anyone, from a prince to a beggar, with perfect propriety. But the question was, Where was he to find her? How was he to let her know?

As a matter of fact, he did not see her again. Once in the many walks which he now took after he returned from the office through streets in which 'families' in London for the season might be supposed to inhabit, and in the Park, and other out-of-door resorts, he thought he saw at a carriage window something like the face of which he was in search. But the carriage passed quickly, and he could not even be sure that it was she whom he saw, much less had he any possibility of following or ascertaining where she went. Had this meeting (which he was not sure was a meeting) taken place in the street, he might have jumped into a cab and followed the carriage; but it was in the Park that he had that momentary glimpse of the face which might possibly be hers; and any idea of following was out of the question. He waited in the hope that the carriage, which had flashed along with a pair of fine horses, not at promenade pace, might turn back, but it did not, and perhaps it was not *her* after all. This was all that John saw of the young lady, whose image continued to hold possession of his fancy. He had seen her twice in one day, he had talked to her for about ten minutes, and yet he seemed to know her better than all the rest of the women put together whom he had met with in the course of his life. Elsie, surely the most familiar image, faded and grew indistinct beside this figure, which filled his imagination. He seemed to see her before

him whenever he sat down to think, which was an exercise he began to like better than he had ever done before. Thinking, however, meant with him something different from the ordinary understanding of the word. It meant something much more like the opening of a private little picture gallery or select museum, in which one animated and delightful presence had been secured. He sat down, and the door opened, and she came out and looked at him. All the changes that had come over her face during that ten minutes' talk were preserved, and recurred again as John pursued his meditation, especially that impulse of the hands to take his, which had been so promptly repressed. Sometimes it was not repressed in that little lady of the picture gallery. As the climax of a long train of 'thinking,' she would sometimes do it with a dart, with a momentary touch, both hands clasping his. When this delightful fictitious climax occurred, John would start from his dream with a sort of abashed ecstasy, and laugh shamefaced, and say to himself, what a fool he was! What an absurd idiot! But yet the moment when that idiocy came back was the most pleasant of the day.

The year went on, however, with the usual indifference of time, and the seasons to all our desires or thoughts. Summer passed, and autumn and Christmas approached again. John Bolton's life was very monotonous. Every morning at ten o'clock, he went to the office—every evening between five and six, he came back. The work was not hard—now and then on a mail day he would be later. This was almost the only variety. They had their little pleasantness—their jokes and discussions at the office, which helped to pass the time away. But these did not count for much, when you looked back upon them—and the course of that year when it was over looked like one somewhat grey day, always the same. A few weeks before Christmas, John heard from Elsie that his father was worse. The old gentleman had been going very gradually down hill all this time, and now, at last, with those last jolts and convulsions over the first roughness of the journey, he seemed to be arriving at the end of it. The family were all very 'resigned,' feeling, perhaps—as who would blame them for feeling—that it was well this end should come at last—but in the meantime renewed expenses of all kinds were necessary, consultations of doctors, all sorts of appliances to make the exit from life easier. The family, though resigned, would not for the world have made it possible for anyone to say that Dr. Bolton had been neglected. 'I am sending Elsie a cheque by this post,' the elder brother wrote, 'and I hope, my dear John, that you will do your share. I know your income is not a large one, but neither are your outgoings. You have not children to educate, as we have.' This was very true, no doubt, but perhaps John was more feelingly aware of the smallness of his income than of his exemptions. He did not know how he was to send his share to Elsie. He was writing to her, oh, so difficult a letter, telling her how impossible this was, making designs with his pen listlessly of the blots on his writing-book, when suddenly a remembrance came into his mind, which for a long time had dropped out of it. He searched in the pocket of his writing book for that envelope without any address, which he had found in the secret drawer, and then it all came back to him. How he had saved it from Jack the Burglar; how, after Jack the Burglar's last visit, he had burned it, watching it turn into black ashes on his little ash tray. Everything came before him in a moment; he must have had a very pictorial imagination, though he neither painted nor wrote. He saw the black film curling on the ash tray, and then he saw the letter unconsumed, and the flourishes of the writing, and the forms of the initials—J.B., and then G.C., Poste Restante, The Hague. All this came before him with a flash. The entire story of the letter had gone out of his head. He had forgotten it—if memory ever did awaken, it was with a vague sense of discomfort, which proceeded from he knew not what. For, as the reader knows, he had never felt that he was wrong in keeping the letter or on acting upon it. He had saved it from the burglar. He had regarded it as a sort of practical joke. Notwithstanding, there had risen a faint uneasiness about it in his mind, and he had accordingly, by a process quite familiar, dismissed it from his thoughts. He had so many other things that were accompanied by no uneasiness to think about.

But now it started up again, in full vividness and form. Oh, what a thing it is to want twenty pounds, and to have before you a means of getting it which you do not precisely know to be wrong; and which is so easy, so safe from any comment. John did not *know* that it was wrong. He thought, indeed, that it was perhaps some ill-gotten gains, of which an unknown culprit was thus forced to make partial restitution. That was the most reasonable theory which he could form to himself, and that it was a great deal better he should have it, being one of the virtuous public from whom, probably, it had

been taken, than that ruffian Jack, who had criminal written in his face. This, indeed, was not an explanation which would hold water, but with that unconscious art, which, in a moral difficulty, we are all so capable of exercising, he pushed all questions away, now that with a start this possibility recurred to him. After all it was only a possibility. G. C. by this time had probably found out that the J. B. of last Christmas was not the real J. B., and very likely he would not reply at all. And twenty pounds! Twenty pounds was so much wanted, it would make all the difference at home. Elsie's sad and holy work would be made as easy as such a work could ever be. If it came, he would not himself touch a penny; it should go to Elsie, intact, as he received it—as he received it. The chances were he would not receive it at all, but if he did, would there be any unlawfulness in the method, any wrongness in the appropriation which would not be excused by the object? John was no Jesuit. These thoughts passed through his mind very hurriedly, with a sort of post-haste. He preferred not to think about it. He took out some paper hurriedly, and wrote. A man can do a thing in a moment, and there is an end of it, whereas thinking is a lengthened, unsatisfactory, disagreeable operation.

This was a fortnight before Christmas. In a week there came the same registered letter, the same folded paper, the same soiled English banknotes inside. John took it from the post-office clerk (who he felt looked suspiciously at him) confounded, like a man in a dream. This time he had been more sure than he was at first that it would not come. It could not come—it seemed incredible that such a thing should happen. He took the letter, with a dazed sensation, out of the clerk's hands. And he laid the notes out on his table at home with the same sense of utter confusion and dismay, and then he sent them at once to Elsie. 'If there is anything left you don't want,' he wrote to his sister, 'give it to the poor. I don't want any of the money. I can spare it perfectly. I assure you it is no sacrifice to me.'

Sacrifice! He was very glad to put the notes up in a new envelope to send them off, to get rid of them. He got no pleasure at all out of them, as he had done on a previous occasion. But surely if anything could purify money which perhaps had a taint upon it, it would be sending it to Elsie. The employment was holy, whatever the origin might be.

Elsie was greatly surprised, touched, nay, overwhelmed, by this remittance. She wrote to all the others, who had contributed sparingly—not less than duty demanded, but no more—about John's munificence. 'Dear Jack; I don't know how he gets it. He must do without his little comforts even—everything—and I am sure he works in the evening—writing or something—otherwise, how could he ever save twenty pounds from his salary? I don't like to take so much from him. Yet, oh, how I thank God for giving me this comfort in the midst of so much trouble!' John was much disturbed himself by Elsie's letter of thanks. It made him very guilty and unworthy. But the effect it had upon his brothers and sisters was wonderful. They began to respect him; to hold him up to public approval. 'My brother Jack is so very good—nothing could be kinder. He makes the noblest use of his savings,' one enthusiastic sister cried. His savings—it is a fine thing for a young man, a clerk in an office, when his savings begin to be talked about.

Dr. Bolton died hard, as such old men so often do. He died by inches, long after his family had resigned themselves to his lot. It was late autumn again before Elsie, deeply-trimmed and veiled with crape, came to the Gardens to occupy, for a few weeks, a little room which Mrs. Matthews had given up to her. John would not have asked his sister to such a place as the Gardens if he could have helped it; but Elsie said she felt herself more to Jack than to anyone, and that a few weeks with him would do her all the good in the world. She had got a situation very easily, her excellence being known, to which she was going after Christmas. But in the meantime, for a few weeks, to be with Jack was the pleasure she desired most, and to put all his socks and shirts in order was a pleasure worthy of the—well, no, not of the goddesses, who were never known to care about domestic pleasures.

About this time a very gratifying and delightful change happened in John Bolton's fortunes. The partner of the bank where he had first been placed by his father, and where he had not 'given satisfaction'—being an old friend of the family, attended Dr. Bolton's funeral. And there he heard of Jack's 'savings,' and of his generally exemplary behaviour. The savings gave an emphasis to the good behaviour which nothing else would have done, and this gentleman, who was the Mr. Wild, of Boys, Wild, and Co., the well-known bankers, was exceedingly civil to Jack, and requested the young man to call on him when he went back to town. The result was that John Barrington Bolton was reinstated in the bank—with an improved position and prospects; prospects which,

indeed, were enough to turn any young man's head. Elsie said, with tears in her eyes, that it was no more than he deserved—that for once Providence had stepped in visibly and rewarded the best brother, the truest heart, the dearest, dearest fellow! As for Jack, he was much overawed by his good fortune, and felt not deserving, but mysteriously guilty and unworthy—a feeling which, however, yielded, like any other feeling, to the composing action of use and wont.

He had told his sister of many things in the confidences of these few friendly weeks, and with a certain pleasure in letting someone know of that episode (which made it somehow appear more real) of the young lady who had visited Golden Gardens, and had asked him if he were Brunner, and then had disappeared, and never been seen again. Elsie was very much interested, as may be imagined. She read between the lines with the greatest ease, and wondered within herself whether she was worthy of Jack, and when they would meet again, for that they would meet again sometime his sister felt no doubt. *She* would not be so foolish, having once made acquaintance with Jack, to let it stop there. Elsie built her own little castles on this subject, with a conviction that it was no governess, but a lady of high degree, that had charmed John's fancy. She was a governess herself, but she preferred that her favourite brother should marry, as she said to herself, a lady. Ah! but if anyone else had made this distinction between a governess and a lady, what do you think Elsie would have said?

She came downstairs from her queer little garret in great haste, almost tumbling down the narrow stairs, one of the last evenings of her stay with her brother. She rushed into his room out of breath, holding a shabby little book in her hand. 'Jack! look!' she cried, panting, holding out the book to him. 'What does this mean?'

'What?' he said, alarmed. He took the book in his hand. It was a very shabby book; a volume of 'Gil Blas,' in paper boards, badly printed, yellow, and soiled. Then he looked up at her, excited and breathless, with a laugh. 'Why, it's "Gil Blas," a book you must know very well by name, Elsie.'

'Oh! as if I was thinking of the book! Look there—there!'

He looked—and the room turned round with John, as if the whole world had somehow got out of balance, for there was 'J. Brunner' written on the yellow title-page. He looked at his sister, with a gasp for breath, with his lips dropping apart, unable to form a word.

Elsie, though her toilette was not what it should be, flew to the bell and rang it violently, and Mrs. Matthews, who had herself been on the point of going to bed, answered it after an interval, with much commotion. 'Lord bless us, Miss, is anything the matter?' she cried; and it was sufficiently remarkable to be rung up at eleven o'clock and faced by two people, pale with excitement, the lady in a dressing-gown, and John with the evening pipe in which he indulged after Elsie's retirement put down upon the table fuming slightly, and probably burning a hole.

'Is this book yours, Mrs. Matthews, or to whom do you suppose it belongs?'

'The book? Lor! Is that all,' cried Mrs. Matthews, with natural indignation, 'to call a body up for at this time? I suppose it's one of a many books as was left'—here she began to awake vaguely to the situation—'along with the curtains and sofa and things'—

'By your late lodger?' cried John. 'And that is his name?'

The woman began to hesitate and mumble, but did her best to maintain her ground. 'His name? I don't know what all this fuss is about, Mr. Bolton. I thought as somebody was took bad, Miss, or you—or something happened. If you don't want nothing I'll go back to bed. I'm not one as gossips about my lodgers,' she cried.

'I want to know if that was his name?'

'I've not got my glasses,' said Mrs. Matthews. 'I can't read writing a mile off. What's his name to you, sir, or any one?' She gave a glance at the book, then waved it away with her hand. 'There's gentlemen,' she said, 'as changes their names. There's some as does it for money—there's some as—I don't rightly know his name. He was always Mr. Brown in the Gardens, and always kind to me. Anyhow,' she said, with a burst of crying, 'if he had a hundred names, it ain't no fault of mine.'

'That is true; but you might have told me this was the man,' said John, letting her go. He reflected after that had she told him it would have made no difference, for he could not have communicated the discovery. But the discovery was one that struck himself with a great blow, though he could not explain why. It was as if a sudden stop had been put to himself, a catastrophe horrible to contemplate, impossible to bear.

(To be continued.)

LOVE'S LOSSES.



OWNERS of rhymes and verbal tunes,
In ballade and rondel,
Blush not to boast their bonnes
fortunes—
They kiss and kiss and tell.

They drone in monkish masquerade,
A litany of loves,
They tell (each name, each I cad, a maid)
A rosary of doves.

But I for mine own names do yearn,
That love from me hath ta'en,
And lent to scholars slow to learn,
Who lend them not again.

'Daphnis' to Chloe doth belong
Of immemorial right—
Each name of mine I've mortgaged long,
And now I'm bankrupt quite.

Oh, thieves of love may change, for shame,
The sweetest words of all,
True lovers choose one note, one name,
And answer to one call.

CHARLES GRAY.

THE STORY OF AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

By MRS. OLIPHANT.

CHAPTER V.

THIS discovery filled John's mind with many thoughts. It confused him, too, in the strangest way. When he tried to connect this fact with others, he was always brought to a stop, as if he had come up against a blank wall. What was there in it which connected it with his own fate? He had a wretched sense of a maze in which his feet were caught, the clue to which was in that man's name. J. B. This was the J. B., of whose name he had taken advantage, and which meant Brunner, who was *her* enemy. His head seemed to go round, and everything to swim about him when he tried to follow out that thought, which would not be followed out, which was mere madness and misery. Elsie made his condition all the worse, by continually urging him to find out *her* and let her know, though he had no way of finding her out, and sometimes wondered whether it was not in a dream that he had seen her. Elsie wanted him to put something in the papers, to tell the unknown that her enemy was found. But then Elsie knew nothing of those bewildering wheels within wheels, that other story which must be connected with this, though no human thinking could find out how—the story of J. B. and G. C., and the twenty pounds. She did not know, and John could not tell her. It was, perhaps, because he found it absolutely impossible to tell her that John's conscience awoke fully, and he felt the shame and horror of what he had done. What had he done? He had fallen into some conspiracy framed by this wretch, who, he now discovered, was expiating his offences in penal servitude: for Mrs. Matthews, on pressure, brought forth the whole story at last. John felt that he must have been taking blood money, hush money, he could not tell what—a thing which to the other Jack would have been natural enough, but to John Bolton was horror and shame. He had robbed even the criminal who ought to have had that advantage, and in so doing had become a criminal himself—as bad, nay, worse than either of the others. His conscience, which had been drugged or paralysed, he could not tell how, now rose up upon him like a giant. It was not necessary even to suggest that somehow She, that vision of an hour, that lady of his life, might be involved in the wrong he had done. Without this aggravation there was enough to condemn him: but the chance lurking behind that she might somehow be a sufferer, was like madness. He felt his brain whirl when he allowed the horror of such an imagination to touch him. It was like some monstrous figure lurking in the dark, which the horrified wayfarer knew to be there waiting for him, and

which with a sudden touch might at any moment drive him mad.

It was a relief when good Elsie, so anxious that he should put an advertisement in the *Times*, so glad to have darned all his socks, and looked after all his shirts, went away. By that time Christmas was very near again. John had pondered day and night what he should do. He was pale and worn with the strain of his mind, endlessly thinking, finding it so hard to decide what was to be done. He had done wrong. Now that his eyes were opened, he could not imagine how it was that he had not recognised it before. He had done wrong. How wrong, or what injury he had inflicted, or what crime made himself an accomplice of, he could not tell. And he owed his promotion and the good character he bore, and his brightened prospects to that crime. He thought sometimes that he must go and seek out the banker who had reinstated him, and tell him how little deserving he was. But even in the miserable confusion of his mind, John felt that this was folly, that no good could be done by such a proceeding. The course he took at last was this. He asked a week's leave from the bank. It was very irregular, for he had not as yet been six months re-established there, but his friend Mr. Wild was kind, and had a respect for the young man who had felt the death of his father so much as to be made ill by it. Fathers are not often mourned so. 'You are quite right to go away,' he said, 'a man of your age must not let himself run down.' John made his preparations very quickly, as soon as he had come to a decision. He wrote once more the enigmatical letter addressed to G. C., at the Post Office The Hague: and by the same mail which carried his letter, he travelled to the same place. It was a stormy journey by night over a wild sea, and he was an unaccustomed sailor—so that the preface of this voyage was not an agreeable one—and even when there, how much uncertainty, how much doubt there was, whether he might find what he went to seek.

It was a very cold morning when he turned out of the hotel where he had snatched an hour or two's rest, in one of the bright streets of the Dutch town. The brightness and freshness of it, the reflections in the canals, the frosty gleam of the sun given back everywhere, did not affect him as they would otherwise have done. He saw nothing, indeed, but the stir about the post-office, the letter-carriers going away with their burdens, and presently the inquirers at the bureaux, the cheerful bustle of the public place. John managed to place himself near the window of the Poste Restante to watch the people who came for their letters. It was the only way he could think of, of finding out the people he had wronged. There were not many applicants, a few ruddy Englishmen, a few travellers of other countries, a few persons of evidently a business character, who caused no anxiety in his mind: there were also a few women whom John watched with a much more keen inspection. But none of them carried off his letter. He had made it such a letter as could not be mistaken if it were seen in any hand. But for the first three or four days nobody came to ask for the letter for G. C. He had come over on Thursday, and it was Monday morning when John's anxious gaze encountered the eyes of a woman in a black cloak directing her steps slowly towards the window. She had the air of being very poor, but she wore a bonnet, which there was a sign of pretension above the servant and working-women class—and a veil over her face, and walked with a measured, slow, despondent pace. She came along as if in the course of a routine which was too strong for her, and from which she had no hope of escape. John felt, with a sudden leap of his pulses, from the moment he perceived her, that this was the natural recipient of his letter. He hurried up close to the window of the post-office, to make sure, forgetting that her low-voiced demand, in a language unknown to him, could convey very little information. But every doubt was speedily set at rest; it was his letter, which he had put in a large brown envelope, that he might identify it the more easily, which she took away in her hand, turning it over and over, looking at it with a sorrowful, lack-lustre gaze, as if it were a serpent which might sting her, though in the dulness of her trouble she did not care much. If John had been in any difficulty as to the matter, it would have been speedily set to rest. She had no thought of concealment, but carried it away fully visible, the brown envelope showing against her black dress. Her face, her look, her appearance in every way expressed a silent hopelessness which went to the heart. She was like an embodiment of despondency and discouragement. John followed her on the other side of the street. She was not difficult to follow. Her slow, dull progress, not turning to the right or the left, was as distinct, through the brighter, more animated stream of passengers as she moved alone along the brilliant background of the red and white houses, in their dazzling cleanliness and brightness, as would have been the current of a

dull ditch beside the shining canal which reflected everything. To John's surprise, this embodiment of poverty and sadness turned not towards the poorer, but the more fashionable part of the town, and, finally, to his consternation, entered his own hotel, pausing at the door a little, to talk to that ubiquitous and all-accomplished porter, who is the pride of every Dutch hotel. Could she have found him out? could she be going to confront him with his own letter? John followed her in with indescribable sensations, shrinking from yet trying to meet her eye. She looked more poor, more sad, more inexpressibly dull than ever when, with a tremor, which he scarcely could conceal, he found himself in the hall of the hotel standing near her. It was some minutes before he could realise what she was doing there. And then, with a chill of horror, with redoubled emotion, it suddenly occurred to him what it was. She had taken out an old leather purse, and was slowly producing, and placing in a line upon the porter's table, coin after coin, a pile of money—both gold and silver. The curious collection looked as if it had been gathered a few pieces at a time. Big, heavy silver gulden or florins, little French francs, gold pieces of different proportions, made up the line. The alert porter watched and counted them piece by piece; then produced a pocket-book, out of which he extracted two notes. How John shuddered! notes like these had smoothed Dr. Bolton's passage to his respectable grave; notes like these had bought Elsie the crape which was so necessary to her self-respect; they had paid John's little bills on a previous occasion, and made his sister's heart light with confidence in his well-doing. The horror and dismay in John's mind surpass all power of telling. He had done wrong: but in that moment no hell could be more terrible than the punishment which came upon him: flames and burning were not near. He stood silent, perforce, trying to look like any other man, and not to betray himself in the busy hall of the hotel where people were continually coming and going, and that little scene went on, with no concealment or secrecy in it, a thing of everyday. She put the notes into the leather purse, now so limp and empty, where all those big pieces had been, and then with a few words and a wan smile to the porter, took up her umbrella and went away.

John's face turned upon the man with such an anguish of inquiry in it, that the porter replied as if he had spoken. 'That's a regular customer of mine, sir, once a year. She wants English notes once a year. She is a poor one to have twenty pounds in her old purse. She's a strange one too,' said that obsequious and universally obliging person, with a nod of satisfaction.

'Who is she? Where does she live?'

'Oh, that's more than I can say. Either it's to send them awaysomewhere: twenty pounds! you would think she never had the half or the quarter of that sum: or else it's to lay them by in a teapot or an old stocking. Oh, yes; there are many like that in Holland,' the porter said.

'But what is her name—where does she live? I should like to know'—

'Oh, if the gentleman wants to know! There will be some one about the house—Here Petre,' shouted the porter. But John had darted out again before anyone answered that summons. He thought he had lost her in the momentary delay, and looked up and down in consternation, but presently he saw her slim, black figure on the other side of the canal tracing slowly a line across the greenness of the Park. It was but too easy to keep her in sight. John followed with his heart beating: no man's heart ever beat more quickly following the steps of his love. He was almost sick with the hasty, stifling pulsation that seemed to choke him, although his pace was so slow, almost more like that of one following a funeral. It was a wonderfully bright morning, sunshiny and clear. To John, accustomed to the atmosphere of London, the radiance was almost dazzling, the colour that was in everything astonishing, though very cold. Perhaps the poor creature whom he was tracking enjoyed it in her forlorn way, or else she was tired, for she sat down on one of the seats in the Park, and sat with her eyes fixed upon vacancy for what seemed to John a long time. That she might not escape him, she had his letter still in her listless hand. Then she got up again, and resumed her way. It was not wonderful that she had stopped to rest, for it was a long way, across the whole town, through coil after coil of poor streets. When she turned in at a doorway at last, John paused in sudden dismay. He was a stranger, not knowing the language, not knowing her name, with no excuse should he push his way after her. He hung back for a moment with a desire to escape. But then he reflected that those notes might perhaps be dispatched at once, and that no time was to be lost. Unwillingly, with his heart beating more loudly, more painfully than ever, he followed her—his victim; yes, that was what she was, his victim—whom he must approach as a criminal, to whom he

must take back that money, of which he had robbed her. He had not got through his life so far without many disagreeable tasks, but none so miserable as this. He had not thought, when he left London, unhappy, yet full of the fervour of repentance and restitution, how painful it would be. But he held himself with a firm hand, and would allow himself no escape.

He followed her up the long stair. In those days there were few houses, if any, in London on the Continental model, and the long stone staircase, with its flats, was quite strange to John. Up and up—he thought the endless flights would never be done. It was an exceptionally tall house, and the woman whom he was following was very poor. She lived on the highest flight, at a height where the inhabitants required few safeguards of their privacy. She left the door open behind her when she went in. John, his breath quickened with the long climb, his heart nearly bursting in excitement uncontrollable out of his breast, followed still. He stopped confused in the dark passage to which that open door gave entrance, but in a moment nerved himself for the supreme effort, and went on to the door at the end, where she had evidently disappeared. A hundred hands seemed to clutch at him to pull him back. What right had he there intruding upon this poor woman's privacy? Did the fact that he had already injured her give him a right to injure her more, to insult her, thrusting himself thus into her house? What John would have given to turn and flee! half his life, everything he had in the world, only to escape and not confront the people whom he had robbed, whoever they might be. Notwithstanding, something stronger pushed him forward, and he went in.

The room was dark—so dark, that at first he could see nothing. It was a long, narrow room, a window at one end, with a curtain subduing the light, a stove in the corner giving forth a sickly heat. But the chief thing was a large bed, upon which lay a man, whose face gradually seemed to collect light, till its whiteness became the centre of the strange, Rembrandt-like scene. The woman had gone up to the bed and given him the letter, which he was tearing open when John entered. In their emotion and preoccupation, neither of them observed the intruder standing behind among the shadows. The sick man read the few words of John's letter, groaning to himself all the time. The woman went on talking in her low, monotonous voice. She seemed to be giving him an account of what she had done, in a passionless, historical way bringing out slowly the notes, which she put down on the bed. To hear a conversation in which you are deeply concerned carried on before you in a strange language, of which you cannot understand a word, is an extraordinary experience. John's impatience of it was tragic and ludicrous at the same time. It seemed to him unendurable that these people should talk, and talk, in a language unintelligible, while he stood there, to whom it was so important. He could follow the tenor of it vaguely through their looks and gestures. He made out that she was telling her husband all she had done, soothing him when he groaned over the letter, holding up the notes, to show him that all was provided for. He, on his part, seemed to call out, clasping his hands, something that was either a prayer or a malediction. The woman did her best to calm him, patting his shoulder, caressing the thin hands, pressing them in her own. Then she placed a sort of low bed-table across his knees, and put ink and paper upon it, urging him, it appeared, to conclude the business at once. When she had done this she turned away from the bed, and hid her face for a moment in her handkerchief, stifling a sob, drying the tears from her eyes. When she raised her head from this momentary overflow of emotion, she perceived John, standing gazing at her behind the door. She uttered a cry of amazement and indignation, and went forward to him, pouring out a flood of unintelligible words. Who was he? How dared he force his way in here? John was sure this was what she was saying. She pointed to the bed with a gesture almost majestic, then to the door, stamping her foot when he did not move. He understood it all, though he did not understand a word. The man on the bed raised himself up, turning his pale face, with wild, intensely anxious eyes, looking out of the puckers of the contracted eyelids at the intruder.

'Listen to me,' cried John. 'I am an Englishman. I can speak a little French. *Je sais parler Français, un peu.* I come on serious business—*pour des affaires—importantes.*'

He thought that probably his French was very bad, but there was no time to pause upon grammar. The words produced a strange effect upon the hearers. The man fell back upon his bed with a faint exclamation—the woman replied eagerly in broken, but hasty English—

'I comprehend a little—What say you? What is it?' she said.

What was it? How was he to say it? He cleared his throat, the blood came in a rush to his head, singing in his

ears, then ebbed again, leaving him chill and shivering. 'I have a confession to make—I have a restitution'—the words would scarcely come. Abashed, ashamed, guilty—a culprit without any plea—he stood before these suffering people, on his trial—nay, worse than on his trial, self-condemned. 'I have a restitution—to accomplish!'

'What say you—what say you?—what is it?' the woman repeated, in great excitement, seizing his arm.

The man on the bed had risen up again on his elbow. He called to his wife to let John go—and beckoned with his skeleton hand, 'Here, here!' he cried. John approached the bedside as if he were being led to execution, and the touch of those feverish fingers on his hand drawing him close, was to him like the touch of the executioner's steel. The sick man drew him close, and raised his ghastly face to John's ear. 'From Brunner, from Brunner?' he said, then dragging himself up still closer, with his thin cheek almost touching John's, breathed in an anxious whisper, 'Say nothing—tell nothing—not to her a word—not to her—not to her a word!' The young man felt the shrill whisper go through and through him like steel.

'I am not Brunner, and I have nothing to tell,' he said out loud, with a desperate calm. 'Brunner is out of harm's way, a convict for ten years—he can do no more harm to you or anyone. I found that cursed letter by chance two years ago—I sent it for a joke—I meant nothing—I knew nothing. When the money came I didn't know what to do—And I was poor too: I used it. Next year I did it again. But I've brought you back the money,' he cried. 'I have brought it all back. Forgive me if you can—I can't forgive myself—I have acted like a scamp and a villain—but I'm not that,' he cried, with a sob bursting its way out of his labouring throat.

'What say you—what say you?' The woman cried again. She looked from him to her husband with devouring anxiety. 'What say?—what say?—He go too fast—I comprehend—only a little,' she cried.

The sick man had fallen back on his pillows. 'I too,' he gasped. 'I understand only a little. But it is good news!—it is life—to the dead!—but too fast—say again slower—say again!'

'Say again,' the wife said, seizing John's other arm.

He prepared to make his confession over again, but with reluctance and disappointment, the first excitement failing, and his strength with it. How was he to call himself a villain over again? He put his hand into his pocket, and drew forth the book in which he had placed four clean crackling ten pounds—how different from those he had received!—and put them down on the bed—the sick man following every movement with his eyes, the wife bending forward, watching, holding John's left arm.

In the midst of this there suddenly arose behind him a voice, making a sudden, strange, sweet, incomprehensible explanation. He stood and listened for a moment, struck motionless, feeling as if he could not turn his head to save his life. He could not understand a word. The voice rushed into the silence like a new-comer entering the room, full of animation, eloquence, as light and quick as the carol of a bird. It was Dutch, but it seemed the language of Heaven to John. He divined presently that it was his own English speech which was thus being reproduced, made plain and clear. The face on the bed lighted up with a wonderful illumination of joy. The woman dropped John's arm, clasped her hands, murmured words of assent and understanding; then bursting wildly into tears, seized John's hand, and would have kissed it in the extremity of her wonder and joy.

This strange attempt brought him to himself. He had been standing stiff, immovable, held fast, as if by a spell. But, good heavens! a woman—anyone trying to kiss his hand! He gave a jump of horror and dismay, which broke up the group, and turned round and faced the interpreter at last.

He had no more doubt who she was than, I hope, the reader has. He turned round quite quietly, not astonished, not with any dash or rush of eagerness, as if this sight of her was to be the only one. There would be plenty of time to watch her, to learn her looks, to see the soft eyes glow, the quick flush of generous feeling rise and fall upon her face. He knew exactly how she must be looking, as he had seen her in his dreams a thousand time. He was not astonished. No, no.

But yet it was surprising, after all. She too clasped her hands together, as she had done in Golden Gardens, and many a time afterwards in his dreams (the mother's gesture was the same, now he came to think of it), and then the hands parted, flew to his, embraced it for one moment with a velvet touch.

'Ah! I was right after all,' she cried, 'it was you.'

'I, Mademoiselle, no; I am not Brunner. I knew

nothing, nothing of him—not till a few weeks ago—not till, — John stammered with eagerness, trying to explain.

'I did not mean the enemy. I meant the friend. Did I not say he would be the friend, Mutterchen! Mutterchen! Did I not say it? And it comes true.'

'He bring back all the money!' said the mother, stupefied; taking up those crackling pieces of paper in her hand.

'And more than that—the good faith—the heart's belief.—the peace!' cried the little lady of John's heart. She had said something like it in his dreams long ago. He bethought him afterwards that there was nothing good, delightful, heavenly that she could say which had not been said before by her image in his dreams.

This story ended as all good stories should end—though not immediately. John disclosed himself fully as John Barrington Bolton, of Boys' Bank, a man with prospects, a man with antecedents, his mother a Barrington. He walked home with Marie (which was her name, of course—what other name could she bear?) to the handsome house where her 'family' lived, all of whom were entirely devoted to their governess. He told her a great deal about himself on that walk—everything almost; notwithstanding that, next day, and for years after, there still remained a thousand things to tell. When he had left her, reluctantly, he went back to the parents, and was taken individually into their confidence. The sick man confided everything to him when his wife was out of the way. How he had been a fool in days long past, and had atoned for his folly in a prison, where he had met Brunner, who since then had held a lash over him for many years. The sin of his youth had been bitterly repented of. It was unknown to his wife or any of his friends here. The shadow would have passed away altogether from his life, but for that constant horrible reminder, with its yearly tax and endless alarm. 'To her not a word—oh, never a word!' the poor man said. 'If his sentence is so long I am safe, quite safe. I shall die long before. But that she may never know!'

The wife beckoned John to another room when her husband fell asleep. 'He will not tell me—but see, I have defined. It is some wicked ting of his youth,' she said. 'But dere is no wicked ting in my poor man now. Should I, his wife, judge him? De good God bless him.' As for John, who felt how much he too had to be forgiven, and how his sin was bringing him not punishment, but reward, we may be sure he had not a word but of tenderness and pity to say.

He moved out of Golden Gardens as soon as he got back. He had scarcely any money to live on till his next quarter-day, but managed somehow. He took a little house, a short way out of London, next spring—and before the following Christmas brought home his wife laden with presents from her 'family.' The first Sunday after they walked to the Gardens, and went over all that little episode of the past. She remembered as much of it as he did. She remembered her first glimpse of him in his shirt-sleeves. They went up together to the old rooms, and spoke very kindly to Mrs. Matthews, who had now got another very good lodger, to whom she praised John as the perfection of young men. 'I will not mention it, sir,' the landlady said, with an air of mystery, 'but this gentleman is in the secret force, sir, if you know what that is—a gentleman, sir, in plain clothes.' This effectually secured that there should be no reappearance of Mr. Brunner, or of his brother, the burglar Jack, in the Gardens, and added a comfort the more to the young pair's happy beginning of life.

Elsie had a regret—it was that Marie, after all, did turn out a governess. She would have liked John, the best of brothers, to have married a lady. But, on the whole, it turned out better and far more convenient—for Marie entered into all her tribulations when she came 'home,' as they insisted she should call it, for her holidays, and understood her far better than any duke's daughter could have done, and she came in time to allow that everything was for the best.

Perhaps it was for the best, too, that neither of Marie's parents lived very long. It was discovered after their death that Brunner, getting free on a ticket-of-leave, had written again to G.C. at the Post Office, The Hague. But the letter lay there and got yellow, and nobody noticed, G.C. by that time being far out of the way of all extortioners or unjust persons. The Post Office authorities put it in their window, where many people stared at it, and where it gradually decayed and fell into dust, as right was—

It is supposed now by most people that when Boys, Wild and Co. take to themselves a new partner, that partner will be Mr. Barrington Bolton. He never signs anything now, nor makes any public appearance without giving himself the full glory of that double name.

THE END.